SHADOWS IN THE DESERT

ANCIENT PERSIA AT WAR

DR KAVEH FARROKH

Foreword by Professor Richard Nelson Frye

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ANCIENT PERSIA AT WAR

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Dedicated to my mother Sara who worked so hard for my education
and who always encouraged me to stay the course.

My profound thanks to Ruth Sheppard of Osprey Publishing for all her patience, creativity and support in encouraging me to engage and complete the writing of this book.

KF

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Front cover: Glazed brick relief of archers from the palace of Darius the Great at Susa. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)
Spine: Embossed lion-griffin ornament from the Oxus treasure. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)
Back cover: Sassanian silver plate, *c.*5th–7th century AD. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)
Endpapers: Detail of the relief from the throne of Artaxerxes I at Persepolis. (© 2006 Alinari/Topfoto)
Title page: Bronze head of a Sassanian king, 6th century AD, found in Ladjvard, Iran. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

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Foreword

The Mighty Persian Warriors

It is significant that the Arabic word "Faris" means both the people but also a powerful man or a mounted warrior. The latter is what the Iranians, both in Iran and on the steppes of Central Asia, were famous for throughout their history: their horse-riding cavalry. The Iranian cavalry, almost always members of the nobility, were the chief strength of the armed forces whenever they took the field. These cavalrymen contrasted with the infantry armies they fought, the Greek hoplites and the Roman legionaries. In the battles between these powers, both cavalry and infantry were on occasion victorious.

The story of the Persian warriors begins with the Indo-Iranians coming from Central Asia over three millennia ago. The domestication of the horse had happened much earlier, and the Indo-Iranian invaders are described as driving chariots, similar to those of the Homeric Greeks. It may be that the horse was also employed at this time to round up sheep or cattle, probably without a saddle or bridle. In any case the proper transport for a nobleman was the chariot. The Iranians spread to the west and the Indians into the subcontinent, inspiring fear wherever they went. In the east the Khwarazmians, Sogdians, Bactrians, and others invaded lands sparsely populated by tribes such as the Dravidians, while in the west, the Medes and Persians occupied the area formerly under the rule of Elamites, Mannaeans, and Caspian tribes, and gave their language to the inhabitants. One may suppose that the Iranians were similar to the later Turks who occupied Azerbaijan and Anatolia.

The Assyrian Empire sought horses from the Medes, who soon became strong enough to challenge the Assyrians. According to Herodotus, Cyaxares organized the Medes from tribal levies into an army, with soldiers carrying spears and cavalry, thus instituting a regular force, although it was not until the reign of Cyrus the Great that the form of the Median-Persian army was perfected. At about the same time, the Armenians were spreading from Anatolia into Azerbaijan.

Even though Cyrus the Great was closely bound by marriage to the Median house, Darius was the true founder of the Achaemenid Empire. The empire had a great advantage over previous states, since it had a secular "king's law" placed above the religious laws of the various kingdoms comprising the huge empire. The king's law was one of the factors that held the empire together over several centuries. Darius' tomb at Naghsh-e-Rustam has the inscription:

> How many are the countries which Darius the king held? Look at the sculpted figures which bear the throne platform. Then you shall perceive and it will become known to you that the spear of the Persian man has gone far.

Under the early Achaemenid rulers the army was most effective in conquering and subduing revolts. Unfortunately, over time the nature of the army changed. With the inclusion of levies from various nations, the troops became more uncontrollable, and less of a professional army, to the extent that the Achaemenid emperors started to hire well-trained Greek mercenaries to fight their battles. So it was that Alexander, the military genius, brought Hellenistic soldiers to Iran and ended Achaemenid rule.

After the brief Seleucid period of Persian history, a new force from Central Asia arrived in Iran, the Parthians, or Arsacids, as their dynasty was called. Three new features appeared in the military under the Parthians; one was the "Parthian shot" used by the cavalry, second the composite bow, and finally man to man combat before opposing armies. Although mounted archers with their powerful composite bows were held in awe by the Romans, the champions who represented their armies became the feature of this heroic age. At the end of the Parthian period, however, a new type of armored cavalryman riding an armored horse came to the fore, possibly a forerunner of the European knights. These were the cataphracts, who carried long spears, and who were much feared by the Romans. Perhaps at this time, or later, the stirrup was invented, which gave cavalrymen increased traction and versatility. This period of Iran's history saw the beginning of world religions, such as Manichaeism, which caused Christianity to compete with Zoroastrianism.

The Sassanian period was the time of consolidation of central powers and the formation of new units of the army. Also at this time there was a legal and religious orthodoxy such that both religion and state supported each other, rather than one above the other. The frequent fighting on two fronts, against the Byzantines and the Central Asian invasions, not only kept armies alert, but also brought Iran into the money and trading arena. From the beginning of the Sassanian dynasty the amount of pure silver in Iranian currency remained high, and everywhere Sassanian coins were highly valued, while elsewhere coinage was debased. From formerly an agricultural economy, now merchants and traders began to open new routes to the Far East and Africa. Rather than fight over territory and engage in extensive warfare, it became easier to pay opponents. Such was even more the case than with the Achaemenid Empire, and just as Darius, the last Achaemid king, died in the northeast, so did Yazdegird, fleeing from the Arabs.

In this book Dr. Kaveh Farrokh has given us the Persian side of the picture as opposed to the Greek and Roman viewpoint which has long dominated our understanding of these wars. It is refreshing to see the other perspective, and Dr. Farrokh sheds light on many Persian institutions in this history, such as the Sassanian elite cavalry, the "Savaran." Osprey Publishing is to be congratulated for publishing *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War*, which presents another aspect of the wars between East and West in ancient times.

Professor Richard Nelson Frye
September 2006

Introduction

Persia or Iran?

Persia or Iran? In a sense, both are correct when referring to the same entity: a middle empire that sat between the great civilizations of China and India to the east, and the Greco-Roman world to its west. The Greeks identified the first Iranian Achaemenid Empire as "Persseya" or Persia, though the Iranians would have referred to their home as "Eire-An" or "Ir-An" (lit. land of the Aryans).

The original Iranians were a family of peoples comprising the Medes, Persians, and the mostly extinct northern Iranians (Saka/Scythians and Sarmatians). From its very inception Iran, or Persia, has been a multilingual, multiethnic and multifaith nation. The Iran of today is host to not only the New Persian language, but a plethora of other Iranian languages such as Kurdish, Baluchi, Luri, and Mazandarani. Turkish-speakers also predominate in Iranian Azerbaijan to the northwest, and Arabs are seen along the Persian Gulf coast and in Khuzistan to the southwest. Iran is also multiregional in that it boasts a large variety of terrains and climates: it is not just a desert empire. Much of Iran's legacy derives from her north and northwest, connected to the Caucasus and Anatolia, as well as Central Asia, a region from which the original Persians and Medes hailed. The Persian Gulf bears a profound Iranian legacy to this day.

The term Persia is correct when encompassing all Iranian peoples, especially the Kurds and the Azeris who are largely the descendants of the ancient Medes. The Medes were the true founders of Iran, and it was through them that the foundations for the empire of Cyrus and Darius were laid. The northern Iranians played not only a major role in the creation of Persia but were the vital link in the transmission of the cultural legacy of the Iranian plateau long after the fall of the Achaemenids to Alexander.

The Parthians not only restored Persia after the Alexandrian conquests, but also laid the basis of the Sassanian Empire, the cultural legacy of which exists to this day. The Parthians and Sassanians won a number of spectacular victories against Rome, and proved themselves to be the worthy heirs to a mighty empire. Despite the fall of the Sassanians to the Arabs in the 7th century AD, their cultural legacy permeated to the Caucasus, the Arabs, Islam, Europe, China, Japan, India and the Far East. In victory or in defeat, Persia has exerted a profound influence on world civilization, notably in theology, technology, science and learning, commerce, laws, communications, militaria, equestrian affairs, arts, architecture, and music.

Chronology

10000 BC	The rise of agricultural economies in modern-day western Iran, northern-central Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. The Proto Indo-European (PIE) language appears in eastern Anatolia–northwest Iran–Armenia–Iraq–Kurdistan regions
8000 BC	PIE farmers spread across Anatolia, across the Aegean and into Europe
5000–4000 BC	PIE immigrants arrive in the Ukraine
4000 BC	Horseback riding invented in the Ukraine
4000–3000 BC	The birth of the warrior Kurgan society. Expands east, and west into continental Europe
3000 BC	Rise of Andronovo culture in the Urals in eastern Ukraine, Pontic-Caspian region, and much of Kazakhstan
1600–1200 BC	Andronovo Aryans continue to migrate eastwards into Central Asia
1500 BC	First Indo-Aryan (undifferentiated Aryans) migrations from Central Asia onto Iranian plateau and into Mesopotamia-Syria. These fuse with the Hurrians to form the Mitanni
1200–1000 BC	Full-scale Aryan migrations onto the Iranian plateau and Afghanistan
811–730 BC	Assyrian raids into Iran
727 BC	Ascension of first king of Media, Deioces; exiled by Sargon II to Syria by 715 BC
674–653 BC	Reign of Phraortes
652–625 BC	Invasions of Media by Saka Paradraya
624–585 BC	Reign of Cyaxares, unites the Aryans of Iranian plateau; forms the Spada
612 BC	Fall of Assyrian capital Nineveh: Cyaxares allies with Babylon to crush Assyria. Urartu in Caucasus falls to the Medes
584–549 BC	Reign of Astyages, the last Median king
***c.*575 BC**	Birth of Cyrus the Great
559 BC	Cyrus ascends the throne of Anshan (western Persis). Ancient kingdom of Elam (2700–539 BC) absorbed into Persis
550 BC	Cyrus the Great defeats Astyages at Ecbatana. Medes and Persians unite to form Achaemenid Empire
547 BC	Cyrus conquers Lydia, defeats Croesus at Lydian capital of Sardis
539 BC	Fall of Babylon to Cyrus
530 BC	Cyrus dies in Central Asia fighting Queen Tomyris and the Massagetae
530–522 BC	Reign of Kambujiya II. Conquers Egypt in 525 BC. Death followed by rebellion and pretenders to the throne
521–486 BC	Reign of Darius the Great. The empire reaches its greatest extent under Darius
520–513 BC	Darius conquers parts of northwest India (Sind and Punjab)
519 BC	Darius conquers the Saka of Central Asia
512 BC	Darius' campaign against the Saka Paradraya ends in failure
499–494 BC	Ionian revolt against the Empire. Darius re-establishes control in 494 BC

490 BC	Darius and the Achaemenids defeated at Marathon by the Greeks
486–465 BC	Reign of Xerxes I
484 BC	Egyptian and Babylonian revolts suppressed
480 BC	Xerxes invades Greece with a large multinational army. Wins costly victory at Thermopylae, sacks and burns Athens. His navy is defeated at Salamis
464–425 BC	Reign of Artaxerxes I. Defeats Egyptian revolt in 459
448/447 BC	Peace Treaty of Callias between Artaxerxes I and the Delian League
431–404 BC	The Peloponnesian War
404–359 BC	Reign of Artaxerxes II. Defeats rebellion of his brother at Cunaxa in 401
400–387 BC	War with Sparta
382–336 BC	Reign of Philip II of Macedon
373 BC	Egypt breaks away from the Empire
368–367 BC	Revolt of the satraps
359–338 BC	Reign of Artaxerxes III. By 342 BC Egypt reconquered, and all revolts suppressed
336–330 BC	Reign of Darius III, the last Achaemenid king
334–330 BC	Alexander the Great conquers Achaemenid Persia
322–301 BC	Diadochic Wars. Seleucus Nicator (r. 312–281) appropriates Mesopotamia, Media, the Iranian plateau, eastern and northeast Iran, modern Afghanistan, parts of eastern Anatolia, Syria, and Central Asia
300–200 BC	Parni migrants from Dahae federation arrive into Parthia in Iran's northeast from Central Asia
261–246 BC	Reign of Antiochus II Theos. Greco-Bactria secedes
247–245 BC	Andragoras the Seleucid satrap of Parthia revolts against Seleucids
241 BC	Ashk dominates Parthia and ousts Andragoras
209–206 BC	Antiochus III (r. 223–187) attacks Parthia, forces Ashk II to acknowledge Seleucids
191 BC	Antiochus III is crushed at battle of Thermopylae in Greece
189 BC	Antiochus III is crushed at battle of Magnesia in Anatolia
171–138 BC	Reign of Mehrdad I. Captures Seleucia and King Demetrius II (r. 146–141)
129 BC	Farhad II (r. 138–127) defeats Antiochus VII (r. 138–129) at the battle of Ecbatana
123–88 BC	Reign of Mehrdad II
100s BC–early 200s AD	Rise of the Kushans. Development of Indo-Iranian-Greek Buddhist arts and the promotion of Buddhism
120s BC	Founding of Ctesiphon
100 BC–AD 100	Saka arrivals from Central Asia. Many settle in southeast and northeast Iran
53 BC	Marcus Licinius Crassus' army destroyed by Parthians under Surena at Carrhae
51–39 BC	Pacorus initiates a series of battles with the Romans. Joined by Quintus Atius Labienus in 40/39. Both Labienus and Pacorus destroyed by 26
36 BC	Mark Antony unsuccessfully invades Parthia and is defeated in Media Atropatene
20 BC	Negotiations of Farhad IV (r. 38–2 BC) with Augustus
AD 63	Valaksh I (r. 51–80) and Emperor Nero arrive at a compromise over Armenia
AD 75	North Iranian Alan invasions of northwest Iran
AD 115	Emperor Trajan launches devastating invasion of Parthia
AD 117	Emperor Hadrian approaches Parthians with offers of negotiation
AD 162	Valaksh IV (r. 147–191) attacks Armenia and Roman Mesopotamia. Lucius Verus mounts a successful counterattack and captures Ctesiphon in 164
AD 198	Anti-Roman actions of Valaksh V (r. 191–208) provoke Septimius Severus to counterattack. Romans capture Ctesiphon for the third time
AD 217	Roman attack on Parthia halts at the inconclusive battle of Nisibis

AD 224	Ardashir I (r. 224–241), local king of Persis, unites with Medes and Kurds to overthrow Parthians at Hormozgan
AD 233	Emperor Alexander Severus attempts to destroy new Sassanian Empire but is heavily defeated at Ctesiphon by Ardashir
AD 241–272	Reign of Shapur I. Defeats Gordian III at Misiche in 244
c.AD 256	Shapur I defeats Philip the Arab at Barbalissos
c.AD 260	Shapur I defeats Valerian at Carrhae and Edessa. Valerian taken prisoner along with 70,000 troops. Shapur overruns Syria and Cappadocia
AD 260–261	Odenathus, king of Palmyra, pushes Sassanians back inside their borders. Launches unsuccessful attack on Ctesiphon and later retreats back to Syria
AD 296	Narses (r. 293–301) defeated by Galerius in Armenia
AD 337–350s	After defeating Arab incursions in the 320s, Shapur II (r. 309–379) attacks Nisibis, but forced to turn to Central Asia to defeat the Chionites by 357. Shapur returns to Nisibis in 350 and captures Amida (Diyarbakr) by 359
AD 363	Emperor Julian mounts a massive invasion of Persia, wins a victory at Maranga. Julian killed in a cavalry raid on June 26
AD 421	Bahram V (r. 420–438) wins a resounding victory over the Hephthalites of Central Asia at the battle of Merv
AD 438–457	Reign of Yazdegird II
AD 449	Yazdegird issues edict obliging Armenians to renounce Christianity. This results in widespread rebellion defeated by the Sassanians on Avarayr Fields in Armenia on June 2, 451. Resistance continues for decades
AD 484	Peroz I (r. 459–484) defeated and killed by Hephthalites. Empire forced to pay annual tribute to Hephthalites. Rise of the "socialist" Mazdak movement. King Balash (r. 484–488) agrees to Armenian right to practice Christianity
AD 488–496	First reign of Kavad I; defeats a Khazar invasion through the Caucasus
AD 498–531	Second reign of Kavad I. Suppresses the Mazdakites
AD 502–504	Kavad's first war with Byzantines
AD 527–531	Kavad's second war with Byzantines
AD 531–579	Reign of Khosrow I. Defeats the Hephthalites in alliance with the Turks. Constant wars fought against Byzantium
AD 588	Turks and Hephthalites invade Sassanian Empire from Central Asia. Bahram Chobin defeats the Turko-Hephthalites, then destroys the forces of the eastern and western Turkish khagans in Central Asia
AD 590	Bahram Chobin seizes power and ejects Hormuz IV (r. 579–590) from the throne
AD 591	Khosrow II (r. 591–628) son of Hormuz regains throne with aid of Emperor Maurice
AD 602	Emperor Maurice is assassinated. Khosrow launches all-out invasion of Byzantium
AD 602–621	Sassanian armies conquer all of Mesopotamia, Syria, Judea, Lebanon, Egypt and Anatolia and put Constantinople under siege
AD 619	Turks and Hephthalites invade Sassanian Empire from Central Asia. Smbat Bagratuni crushes the Turko-Hephthalites in Central Asia
AD 622–628	Emperor Heraclius reconquers lost territories. Khosrow II is executed in Ctesiphon and Sassanian Empire sues for peace
AD 637–651	Arabs destroy Sassanian armies in Qadisiyyah (637), and capture Ctesiphon (638). Yazdegird III (r. 632–651), the last Sassanian king, makes desperate stands at Jalula and Nihavand but is decisively defeated. The end of the Sassanian Empire. The Islamic caliphates absorb Persia
AD 651–838	Heavy anti-caliphate resistance in northern Persia by the Dailamites. Babak Khorramdin leads a three-decade resistance movement from Azerbaijan (816–837)

Part I

The Achaemenids

At its zenith, the first "world empire" stretched from Thrace and the Aegean in the west to Central Asia and India in the east. The achievements of the Achaemenids included the Royal Highway, the first postal system, and a centralized monetary economy. However, probably the empire's greatest contribution to mankind was Cyrus' declaration of human rights and his respect for religious, cultural and linguistic diversity within his empire.

Chapter 1

Before the Achaemenids

The rise of Kurgan warrior culture: the first proto Indo-Europeans

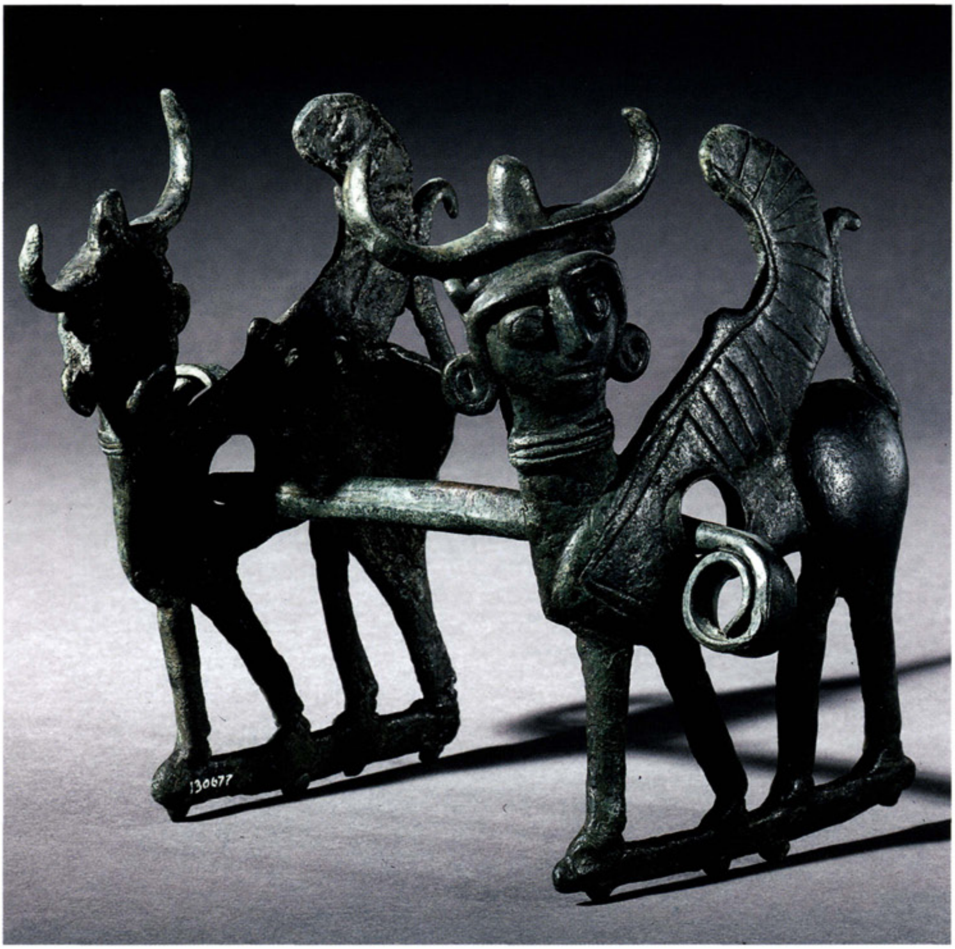
PREVIOUS PAGE

LEFT Panoramic view of the Achaemenid palace at Persepolis. The construction of Persepolis began 80–100 years before that of the Acropolis in Athens. (© Brian A. Vikander/Corbis)

RIGHT Gold plaque of a Saka Paradraya warrior, 4th century BC, from the Kul Oba tomb in the Ukraine. Horsemen such as these formed the vanguard of those Aryan tribes who settled in the Iranian plateau, the Zagros Mountains, northern Mesopotamia, and eastern Anatolia. (Werner Forman Archive/Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

History has generally attributed the origins of the Indo-European languages to the Ukraine *c.*5000–4000 BC. However, recent archeological, linguistic, and genetic analyses now provide a more complex picture.[1] While the Ukraine region played a crucial role in the expansion of all Indo-European languages, there is a growing consensus that the original speakers of the Indo-European languages hailed from a region corresponding to modern northern Iraq, southern Armenia, northwest Iran, eastern Anatolia, Iranian Azerbaijan, and perhaps ancient Albania.[2] Genetic analyses[3] have discovered that the invention of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent and its spread beyond the Near East was undertaken by the ancestors of at least three distinct genetic and language families: the proto Hamito-Semitic, proto Elamo-Dravidian, and proto Indo-European.[4] The languages spoken by the majority of Europeans, Iranians, and Indians were ultimately derived from these Indo-European farmers.[5] The rise of a completely agricultural economy known as the Halaf culture seems to have taken place approximately 12,000 years ago in the eastern region of the Fertile Crescent.[6] This farming activity in the Near East roughly encompassed an arc running from the Kurdish mountains in western Iran onto the Mesopotamian plain, across Syria, parts of Jordan into the Lebanon and Palestine regions.[7] Archeological surveys have also yielded evidence of some of the first domesticated animals, and the world's first agricultural and grain processing equipment, in northern and eastern Iraq and western Iran.[8]

The Indo-European farmers slowly spread from Anatolia, across the Aegean into Europe by 8000 BC. Farming increased population density by 50-fold from the one person per 10 square kilometers (3.9 square miles) typical of early hunter-gatherer economies. Current researchers believe that the proto Indo-European farmers spread across Europe at the average speed of 0.6 miles (1km) a year.[9] By 5000–4000 BC, the farming economy spread into the Ukraine. These Neolithic farmers gradually assimilated the indigenous pre-agricultural Mesolithic population of the Ukraine, where a revolution in technology would profoundly influence the history of mankind.



Bronze horse bit with decorated cheek-pieces, from Luristan, western Iran, early Iron Age, *c.*10th–7th centuries BC. The composite creatures decorating this bit are very characteristic of Luristan bronze-working. Signs of wear on the bit suggest it was not simply a grave offering. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

The equestrian revolution: horsemen of the Ukraine

The domestication of the horse and the invention of horseback riding have profoundly influenced the historical and linguistic development of humanity. The empires of pre-Islamic Persia, the Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sassanians, are all traced to the genesis of these early horsemen. It was in the Ukraine that the cavalry tradition was born, and it was from the Ukraine that the Indo-European languages, as we know them today, spread towards Europe, Central Asia, Persia, and India.

Before the domestication of the horse and the invention of horseback riding, horses roamed wild in large herds across the vast grasslands ranging from the Ukrainian steppes to the mountain borders of the Tien Shan and Mongolia. As grass was often sparse or in short supply, the horse's mouth adapted to make the most of the available food, and a gap developed between the front incisors and the grinding teeth of the jaw. It was this gap that allowed for an ingenious human invention to be inserted: the bit.

Recent research traces horseback riding back to 4000 BC, a full 2,500 years earlier than has been traditionally supposed.[10] This discovery also implies that horseback riding was invented in the Ukraine before the wheel was designed in ancient Sumeria (modern southeast Iraq-Kuwait). Seminal in the revision of equestrian history is the discovery of

Bronze swords from Luristan, 11th century BC. (R Sheridan, Ancient Art and Architecture)

the dental remains of a stallion from Dereivka, dated to approximately 6,000 years ago.[11] The tooth of the Dereivka stallion is beveled and covered in fractures, evidence that the horse was bitted.

It is as yet unclear how the peoples of the ancient Ukraine captured or trained wild horses; perhaps rudimentary forms of ropes and/or lassos were used. Nevertheless, the horse was put to work, pulling carts, wagons, and eventually chariots, and being ridden. The fact that horses were made to adapt to human devices such as metal and bone bits in the mouth and straps to the head makes the invention of horseback riding a remarkable human achievement.

The domestication of horses and horseback riding resulted in several advantages for their owners.[12] The horse was a constant and ready source of milk and meat, and the riding of horses enabled the collection and control of ever larger herds of "untamed" horses for food purposes. Also, riding made the hunting of wild game easier and safer. As a means of transporting material, horses allowed for a six-fold expansion in potentially exploitable territory, enabling trade over longer distances and migration to more distant areas. The military implications of equestrian technology were perhaps the most important. Mounted warriors had increased speed, mobility, and striking power, and wielded a decisive military advantage over their non-equestrian neighbors. Settled population centers with prosperous economies were now vulnerable to rapid raids by mounted warriors virtually immune from countermeasures and retribution.

The Kurgan Indo-Europeans: a Warrior Society

The equestrian revolution was a pivotal factor in the expansion of Kurgan culture, which was seminal in the expansion of proto Indo-European languages and society.[13] The proto-Iranian peoples retained much of the original equestrian culture of the Ukraine, a feature seen repeatedly in the motifs of the mounted hunt and cavalry warfare in Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanian Persia.

Kurgan warriors thrust eastward to Central Asia, and these "eastern Kurgans" were the ancestors of the Aryans. Kurgan successes were due to military technology, based on horseback riding. The very word "equestrian" is derived from the original Indo-European word *ekuo*, which translates as "horse."

The birth of the Aryans: the Andronovo culture

By 3000 BC, the eastern expansion of the Kurgans had resulted in the rise of the Bronze Age Andronovo culture in the Urals, bordering the north of the Caspian Sea and north of Central Asia to its east.[14] It is from the Andronovo, specifically the Sintasha-Petrovka locale of the Ural River, where the original proto-Aryan peoples and languages are first traced.[15] They are known for having mined copper from the Altai Mountains and having lived in log cabin villages.[16]

The word Aryan means "noble," "lord," or "freeman" in Old Iranian languages, and has very little to do with eurocentric doctrines of Nordic racial supremacy, these being first formulated by 19th-century racialist philosophers such as Chamberlain. The archeologist J. P. Mallory states that "as an ethnic designation, the word [Aryan] is most properly limited to the Indo-Iranians, and most justly to the latter where it still gives its name to the country Iran ... the great Persian king Darius described himself as Aryan."[17] While the Indians used the name Aryan to designate that aristocracy in India, they referred to their nation as "Bharat," a designation surviving to this day. The only ancient people in Europe who appear to share the term Aryan with the Iranians are the Celts and their Irish descendants.

The name "Iran" (lit. Land of Aryans) is derived from "Aryanam" (the plural form in Avestan). This later became "Eran/Eirean" and "Iran."[18] Additional contemporary evidence for this development is found among the Iranian-speaking descendants of the ancient Alans in the Republic of Georgia and Russia. These are known as "Ossetians,"[19] who designate themselves as "Ir-On" and colloquially as "Ir-iston." The Ossetian term *iston* is the Iranic equivalent of the Persian *istan* (e.g. Kurd*istan*, Lur*istan*, etc), variously meaning province of, locale, area, etc. The Aryan culture that arose from the Andronovo region is variously termed as "Indo-Aryan" or "proto-Iranian" by Western academics. This is because the Indian Aryans split off from the main body of Aryans who became the Iranians (Persians, Medes, Saka/Scythians, Alans, etc).

The archeological record displays early elements of Aryan culture. A distinctly Aryan funerary ritual was the burial of chariots and horses. The chariot was integral to the later Aryan cast of India[20] as well as Achaemenid Persia. The later *yasht* (hymns of Persia) make numerous references to the sacred role of horses.[21] Similar traditions were found among the emerging Iranian peoples of Central Asia, such as the Massagetae[22] and the Armenians of the Caucasus.[23] Aryan heroes in Persia are consistently depicted as entering battles or sacred places of sacrifice "on horseback."[24] These traditions provide the Aryan foundations of the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanian empires.[25] The Lurs of western Iran are perhaps the last Indo-European people today who celebrate the horse's divinity as well as other ancient Aryan rituals.[26] The Kurgan mound-graves of warriors (male and female) and often their horses can still be seen in northwest Iran, especially in Azerbaijan.

The Aryan advantage in military technology

The Near East and the vast Eurasian steppes had enjoyed extensive contact since the dawn of civilization. Innovations in either region were transmitted as a result of commercial and military contact. By the 3rd millennium BC, the Sumerians of modern south Iraq/Kuwait had constructed a platform of planks fastened together with mortices, mounted onto four primitive wheels.[27] The wagon was pulled by wild asses (onagers) harnessed by a relatively crude device strapped to the face and neck, impairing breathing. This, along with the primitive technology and heavy weight of the vehicle restricted speed to a maximum of 12–15km/h (7.5–9.3mph). Sumerian wheel technology rapidly spread throughout the Near East, the Indian subcontinent, and Europe.

The Sumerians had been in contact with the early Kurgans, most likely through intermediate trade relations.[28] The Kurgans introduced the wheel to the Ukraine,[29] which soon spread to the post-Kurgan Andronovo region. This led to the Aryan invention of the spoked wheel and battle chariot[30] by the 2nd millennium.[31] Numerous war chariots were recently discovered buried at Sintasha-Petrovka in modern Kazakhstan;[32] these are the earliest such finds and attest to the chariot's Aryan origins.[33] It is generally agreed that the battle chariot was introduced into the Near East by Indo-Aryan, Hittite, and Hyksos invaders invading from the Iranian plateau, Anatolia, and the Mediterranean respectively.[34]

Originally a hunting weapon, the Aryan war chariot was built of light hard wood with a platform constructed of a strengthened leather mesh, capable of supporting a driver and an archer. The vehicle weighed no more than 60lb (27kg), and the streamlined, rounded front helped reduce air resistance. The horse's velocity combined with the lightweight vehicle resulted in considerable momentum. This resulted in the chariot being far faster and more mobile than its Sumerian predecessor. The chariot gave three clear battlefield advantages against infantry: speed, an elevated platform for archery, and mobility. The combination of the chariot's mobility with archery warfare resulted in an innovative and devastating weapon.

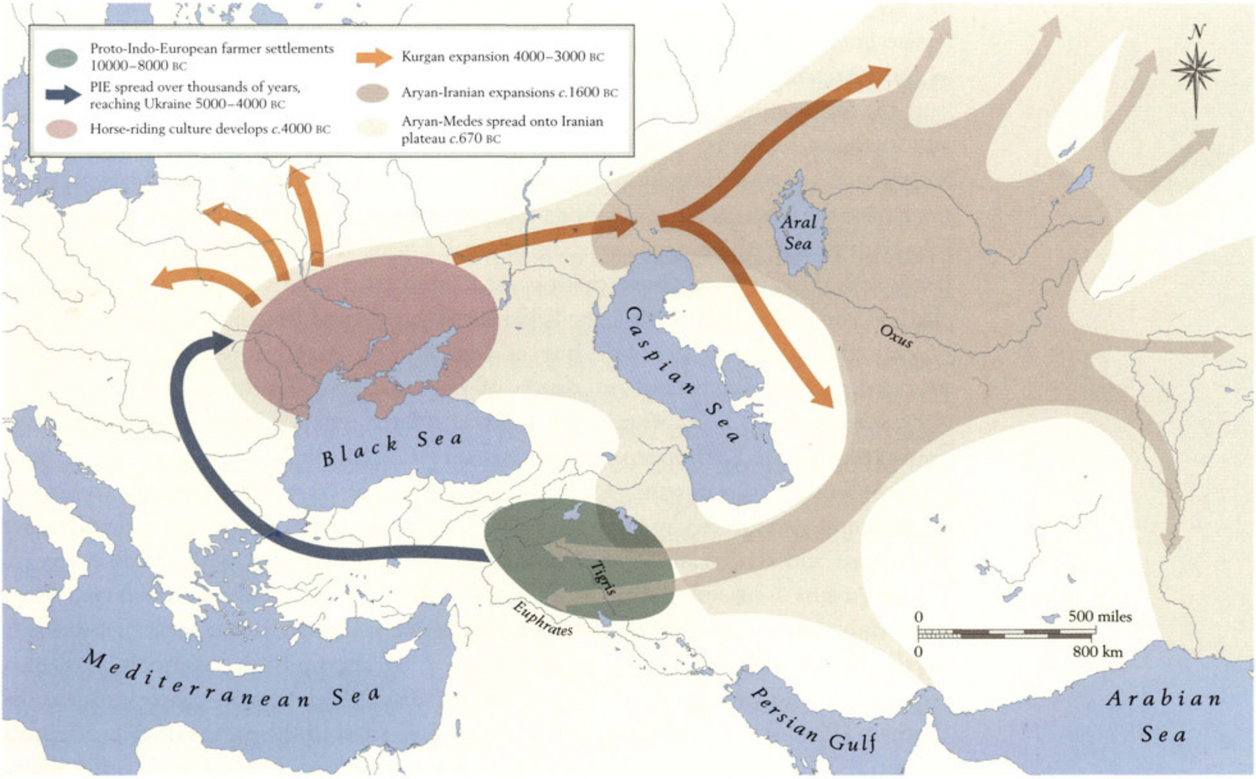
The development of bronze meant that Kurgan warriors could rely on more durable armor, swords, and arrowheads than the opponents they would conquer during their expansions outward from the Ukraine. It is most likely that it was in the early Bronze

Age that daggers evolved into the longer "sword" forms. Many of these dagger-type swords have been found in Luristan, western Iran.

The bow and arrow as a weapon system can be traced as far back as 50,000 years in the early part of the Paleolithic (Perigordiem or Aurignacien) period. The bow was the first mechanical device able to store the power of the muscle, transforming that potential energy to the arrow as propelled kinetic energy. Early primitive bows were constructed of a stave or flexible material; this was connected at its two ends by a string. The origins of the composite bow have been variously attributed to regions such as Central Asia and Egypt. The Egyptian thesis has never been conclusively substantiated, mainly because Aryan warriors already possessed the composite bow upon their arrivals in Iran and India. It is not altogether clear whether this technology was already in existence in Central Asia before the Kurgan arrivals there. What is now almost certain is that archery was very well known to the Kurgans of the Ukraine, as evidenced by the modern English word "arrow," which can be traced to the Indo-European root-word *arkw* (lit. bow).[35]

The composite bow of the Bronze Age era was an evolutionary jump over its Paleolithic predecessor, mainly due to its construction combining layers of different materials instead of a single material.[36] The composite bow was able to propel missiles with much greater speed and penetrating power and range, possibly 100–200 yards (91–183m). The composite bow also led to the development of a large number of different types of arrows. Although their efficiency on the battlefield is undoubted, composite bows were far more

Kurgans and Aryans 10000–670 BC


Proto-Indo-European farmer settlements 10000–8000 BC
PIE spread over thousands of years, reaching Ukraine 5000–4000 BC
Horse-riding culture develops c.4000 BC
Kurgan expansion 4000–3000 BC
Aryan-Iranian expansions c.1600 BC
Aryan-Medes spread onto Iranian plateau c.670 BC
N
Aral Sea
Caspian Sea
Oxus
Black Sea
Tigris
Euphrates
Mediterranean Sea
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
0
500 miles
0
800 km

time-consuming and expensive to manufacture than the traditional all-wood bows. Nevertheless, the combination of the composite bow with chariots was essential to the Aryan expansions into the Iranian plateau, the Near East, and the Indian subcontinent.

Rapid mobility and firepower were not alone sufficient for battlefield success and survival; the warriors also required armored protection against blade weapons and missiles. The first true body armor appeared among the early Aryans, especially those arriving to the Near East, and was essentially bronze or copper scales sewn onto a leather base. Nevertheless, scale armor was very difficult and expensive to produce in large quantities, given the rudimentary state of mass military production technology at the time. This state of affairs remained unchanged even up to 333 BC, when the Achaemenids faced Alexander the Great. It was only during the Parthian dynasty that the Iranians were able to rapidly field large numbers of heavily armored cavalry.

Aryan expansion into the Iranian plateau

The Andronovo region near the eastern Ukraine, Pontic-Caspian region, and much of Kazakhstan became the nexus point from which the great expansions of the Aryans took place. The Aryans first spread eastwards into Central Asia and from there began entering the Iranian plateau to the south: the major route of ingress was from modern-day Khorassan in Iran's northeast. From Khorassan the Aryans spread westwards towards West Asia, reaching the Hurrian and Semitic worlds. The migration of the Aryan tribes towards West Asia came in two distinct waves.

The first Aryans to cross over from Central Asia into West Asia came as vanguards and did not characterize a full-scale population migration. At this time the splitting-off of the Indian branch from the Aryan family had probably not yet occurred, hence their designation as Indo-Aryans. These migrated into Mesopotamia and Syria. The most notable of these were the Mariyannu (lit. warrior) who settled in parts of modern-day northern Syria, Iraq, and southeast Turkey by 1500 BC, regions which were mainly under the rule of the Hurrian kingdom at the time. The fusion of the Hurrians and the Aryan or Indo-Aryan warriors resulted in the Mitanni kingdom. The Mariyannu aristocracy became linguistically absorbed into the Hurrian ruling caste. Like the original Aryans, they fought as archers, they wore heavy scale body armor, drove chariots, and produced the first treatises for horses and chariots, the "Kikkuli Treatises." The Kikkuli texts are derived from the same Aryan peoples of Central Asia who composed the Iranian *Avesta*. Like the *Avesta* hymns, the Kikkuli treatises provided detailed instructions on aspects of horsemanship, and the use of chariots. The Kikkuli manual was so important that it was translated into Akkadian, a Semitic language known to both the Babylonians and Assyrians.

The second Aryan wave was to profoundly change the ethnic character of all areas east of ancient Mesopotamia to Afghanistan. It was from Central Asia that the first decisive migrations and settlements of the Iranian plateau came by 1000–800 BC, Iron Age II. These Aryans went into West Asia, reaching the Zagros mountain chain and from there into modern Iranian Kurdistan and parts of northern Iraq, Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest, and ancient Hyrcania (north Iran). By the mid-9th century BC, Assyrian records contain mention of the Medes and Persians.[37] Other Iranian peoples, such as the Parthava (Parthians), Soghdians, and Bactrians, appeared to the northeast of the Iranian plateau.[38] These Aryans gave rise to the languages, cultures, mythologies, and military traditions of Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanian Persia. Central Asia was to continue its symbiotic relationship with Persia, each influencing the other, resulting in the rise of world's first true armored knights.

Iran's enduring Aryan heritage

Like the weave of the Persian carpet, the people of Iran today are a rich blend of languages, genetic profiles, and ethnic origins, due to successive waves of post-Aryan invasions by Arabs, Turks, and Mongols. The modern Iranian can just as easily appear blonde, Mediterranean, Asiatic or south Asian. Few would seriously claim that Iranians are a "pure" race, as the concept itself is an academic oxymoron. Those Aryans who migrated into Elam certainly intermarried with the resident population as indicated by the appearance of the Achaemenid Immortal Guards at Susa, many of whom have strong dark complexions consistent with the Elamo-Dravidians of pre-Aryan India.

While Iranians may be characterized as racially diverse, a very strong Aryan element has continued to endure. This is especially evident in villages and nomadic groups inside the Iranian plateau (e.g. Kokelu-Boyer Ahmad region), northern Iran (Talysh, Gilan, Mazandaran, Gorgan), the Turkish-speaking northwest (Azerbaijan), and western Iran (Kurdistan and Luristan). An excellent but little-noticed genetic study of the Near East has finally provided corroboration for what linguists, historians, anthropologists, and archeologists have suspected for over a century; many Iranians and Armenians share the European gene pool.[39] A research party led by Professor Martin Richards discovered that Kurds, Azeris, and Armenians have genetic profiles "derived from European and northern Caucasian types."[40] The European gene pool was found to be very rare or non-existent among Arabs.[41] The researchers concluded that the findings are "not entirely unexpected on historical and linguistic grounds."[42] A very recent genetic study by British and Iranian researchers has also found traces of a unique genetic heritage dating back 10,000 years, providing additional evidence that modern Azeris are not genetically related to Turkic peoples despite their predominant Turkish speech today.[43] More research is required, as the Richards study did not focus on Baluchis, Persians, and northern Iran.[44] However, a number of older anthropological studies of northern Iran and nomadic groups within Iran in the 1960s and 1970s have provided similar findings to the Richards genetic study.[45] The researchers also found that the Middle East has a much greater genetic diversity than Europe, not surprising given the region's proximity to Europe, Africa and Asia. This speaks to the artificial nature of the term "Middle East," a non-academic term of geopolitical origin derived from early 20th-century British imperial interest. The term "Middle East" has also resulted in a profound misconception of the identity of Iran and Iranians, especially in North America where almost 90 percent of the populace, including academics and politicians, are unaware of Iran's Aryan heritage.[46]

Aryan expansion into India, Mongolia and China

The second great Aryan split occurred with the Aryan invasions of India, where the Aryan aristocracies became established, especially in the northern regions (e.g. Punjab, Kashmir). Heath has noted that "the first major irruption [to India] was made by warlike Aryan tribes, bringing horses and chariots and the composite bow from Iran."[47]

Luristan axe-head, 10th–7th centuries BC. The blade emerges from the jaws of an unidentified animal. Animal motifs, especially the hunter and prey, appear at Persepolis as well as among Scythians in Europe who combine these with Greek craftsmanship. The animal designs continued to appear in Sassanian heraldry and battle flags, from the 3rd to 7th centuries AD. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

These Aryans thrust into the Indian subcontinent by the eastern portion of the Iranian plateau. The Aryans also entered from the Hindukush mountains of Central Asia. The more advanced Mohenjo-Daro fortress city-states of pre-Aryan Punjab, Sind, Kashmir, and the Indus Valley were militarily unprepared to meet the Aryan challenge. The indigenous Indians simply had no military means of countering the chariot, bronze weaponry, scale armor, and composite bow of the Aryans. The Elamo-Dravidian civilizations of Mohenjo-Daro and Harrapa were overthrown and absorbed. The consequence of this successful invasion was the near total dominance of Aryan languages, cultures, and mythology in India. As in the Near East, Greece, and continental Europe, the Aryan invaders introduced their technology to those they conquered.

So barbaric and destructive was the Aryan invasion that city life in India was practically non-existent for nearly two centuries. It is no coincidence that the Aryan god associated with these conquests is none other than Indra, the destroyer of forts who rides a mystical chariot. In Persia, the prophet Zoroaster was to later relegate Indra, renamed Indar, to the realm of demons.

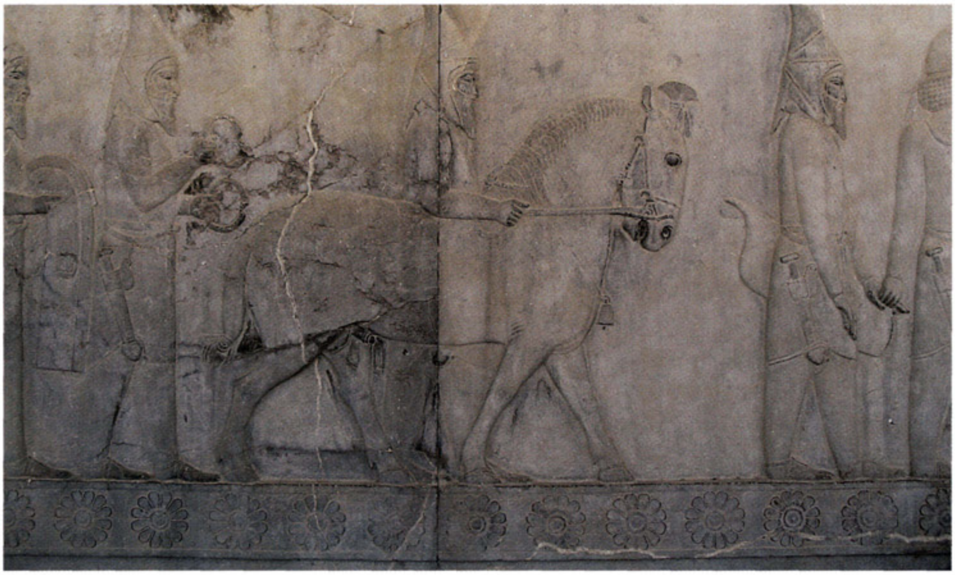
Aryan peoples penetrated beyond the Altai regions as far east as western Mongolia and northwest China. Evidence of these migrations was uncovered in the latter part of the 20th century, when preserved mummies with Caucasian characteristics were found. What is most interesting is the Zoroastrian-style clothing found with the mummies, "witch-like" pointed hats exactly like those of the later Zoroastrian magi of Persis and Media.[48] Variations of these pointed hats are reported among the Saka Tigrakhauda by the Achaemenids.[49] Some of the clothing worn by the mummies is later found as symbols of authority and nobility in Persia.[50]

The rise of the Saka (Scythians)

The Aryans of the Andronovo region had continued to migrate eastwards into Central Asia, between 1600–1200 BC. They spoke variations of the Old Iranian Avestan language.[51] These peoples are historically known as the Saka, or Scythians. The meaning of the word "Saka" has been derived as Old Iranian for "arrows."[52] The three chief groupings of the Saka in Central Asia were the Saka Tigrakhauda, Saka Sugdam, and the Saka Haumavarga. The name Saka Tigrakhauda (lit. Saka with the pointed hats) was in reference to their tall leather caps similar to the Welsh caps of the ancient Celts. The Saka Sugdam was the designation for those Saka who lived beyond Soghdia. The Saka Haumavarga (lit. hauma-drinking Saka) were so-called because of their reverence for the sacred Zoroastrian intoxicating drink, *haoma* (*soma* in Aryan India).

There was also an Aryan migration westward from the western (Srubna) region of the Andronovo towards the Pontic and the Ukraine by the 9th century BC.[53] The first wave, the Cimmerians (Old Iranian for people of the sea), were the first Iranian-speaking nomads of the major Iron Age that came to dominate the Pontic-Caspian steppe. These were then followed by another Saka group known in the Iranian-speaking world as the Saka Paradraya or "Saka beyond the sea," in reference to their location beyond the Black Sea. In the Greek and European worlds, the Saka Paradraya became known as Scythians.[54] It is also possible that the Thracians who emerged to the northeast of ancient Greece were also related to this Iranian entity,[55] however, their Indo-European language appears to be closer to ancient Illyrian (modern Albania in Europe) and Dacian (modern Rumania) than Iranian. The legacy of the Scythians is found in the Iranian names of the great rivers of Eastern Europe, namely the Don (water), Donets, Dnieper (upper river) and Dniester (near river).

Those Saka who had migrated eastwards and northwards into Central Asia became known as the Sauromatians and later as the Sarmatians, Alan, and Massagetae. Their original homeland was those steppes located east of the Volga and the Don rivers.[56] They had emerged as early as the late Bronze and early Iron ages and are classified as northern Iranians by linguists and anthropologists[57] due to their continued usage and development of the Avestan language[58] until their extinction at the hands of Turkic-speaking peoples by the 4th century AD.[59] The Avestan or Old Iranian language in West Asia underwent successive linguistic changes over the millennia, eventually resulting in modern western



Saka warriors armed with the akenakes short sword bringing gifts for the Nowruz celebrations at Persepolis. The Saka (Scythians) were to contribute much to Achaemenid cavalry. (© Livius.org)

Iranian languages such as Persian, Kurdish, Baluchi, and Luri. The descendants of the northern Iranians, the Ossetians of the Caucasus, continue to speak in Digor and Ir-On, the last surviving variants of the ancient Avestan language.[60] The Pashto speakers are also classified as descendants of northern Iranian peoples.

The Scythians and the development of armor and metal technology in Europe

The earliest representation of armor on a large scale has been found amongst the north Iranian Scythian or Saka graves in Siberia, dating from the 5th to the 2nd centuries BC.[61] These graves contained samples of three distinct types of armor, notably splint or lamellar, scale armor, and even mail, indicating these types of armor were developed centuries before they appeared among the cavalry and fighting forces of Europe. Horse scale armor was to continue to develop among the Iranian-speaking Saka of the Ukraine and Central Asia, whose technology profoundly influenced their future cousins in Persia.

The technology of armor development spread westwards into modern-day Russia and the Ukraine,[62] a process that profoundly influenced European technological development. As noted by Lozinski, "a closer study of arms and armor shows that the custom of wearing these types of armor was transferred from Asia to Europe during the first millennium AD."[63] The spread of this technology was due to the presence of northern Iranian speakers of the Avesta, who now dominated the landmass from Siberia to Europe, a dominance that was shattered by the Uralo-Altaic descendants of the Hsiang-Nou and their Hun-Turk descendants centuries later. A number of findings in the early 20th century provided clues as to the migration of these technologies across Eurasia.[64] It was among the ancient Saka Paradraya that the aforementioned types of armor began to appear in present-day Russia and Ukraine, spreading to central Europe and Scandinavia.[65] It would appear that the basic techniques for constructing these types of armor remained unchanged until at least the 10th century AD.[66]

While Europe certainly had a very ancient tradition of metallurgy and weapons development pre-dating the Indo-European arrivals, the role of an "eastern" influence is being more widely acknowledged in mainstream Western historiography. The iron plow, for instance, was commonly misperceived as a "European" invention, when in fact this first appeared among Iranian-speaking peoples centuries earlier.[67]

The Medes and the Persians

The Aryan tribes, notably the Medes, had become dominant on the Iranian plateau by the 9th century BC. It is safe to assume that without the Medes, the subsequent empires of Persia from the Achaemenids to modern-day Iran would never have existed. While many peoples of today's Iran can claim descent from the Medes, it is generally agreed that their heirs are the contemporary Kurds and Azerbaijanis of Iran. The Medes were the most powerful of the Aryan peoples that arrived on the Iranian plateau, and they soon confronted the Assyrians with their cavalry. The Medes did not arrive alone towards West Asia; they were accompanied by a closely related Aryan tribe known as the Parsua, or Persians. Upon their arrivals the two main Iranian tribes, the Medes and the Persians, came into contact with a whole host of peoples ranging from the Caucasus to southern Iran.

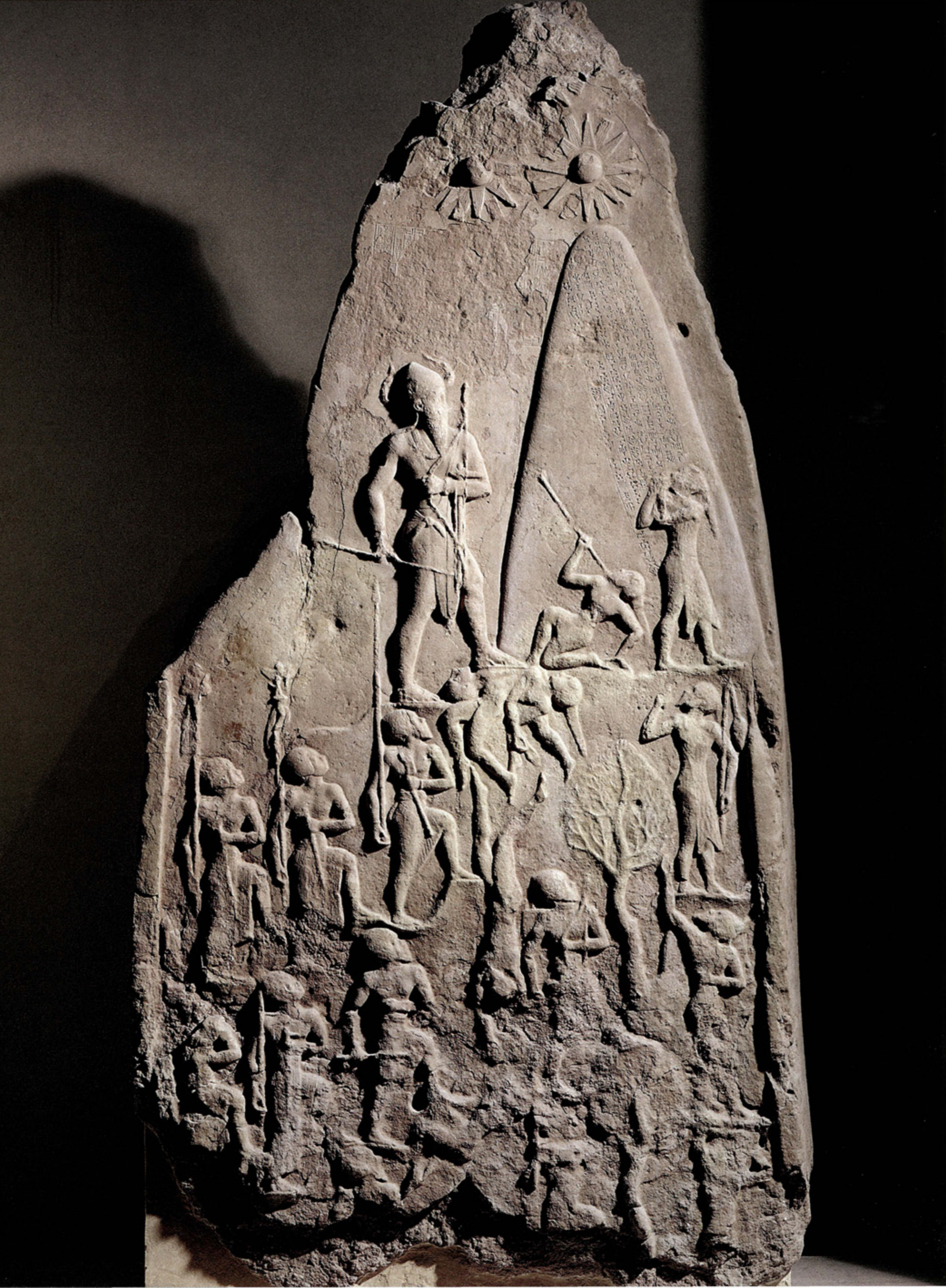
Western Iran, before the Aryan arrivals, was populated by a variety of Caucasian, West Asian, and Elamo-Dravidian peoples. The Medes encountered the Hurrian, Mannaean, Urartian, Quti, Lullubi, Kassite, and Cadusian peoples while the Persians (who later migrated southwest) absorbed the Elamites and their advanced civilization.[68] By the 600s BC, many of these regions had greatly declined in military power, political influence, and population due to the incessant campaigns of the Assyrian Empire. The population of the Medes and the Persians on the plateau had greatly increased by the end of the Assyrian era, thanks in part to the invention of *qanat* irrigation technology which opened up much of the dry interior of the Iranian plateau to cultivation and farming. This allowed for Aryan expansion into these regions and the assimilation of the remnants of West Asian and Elamite peoples.

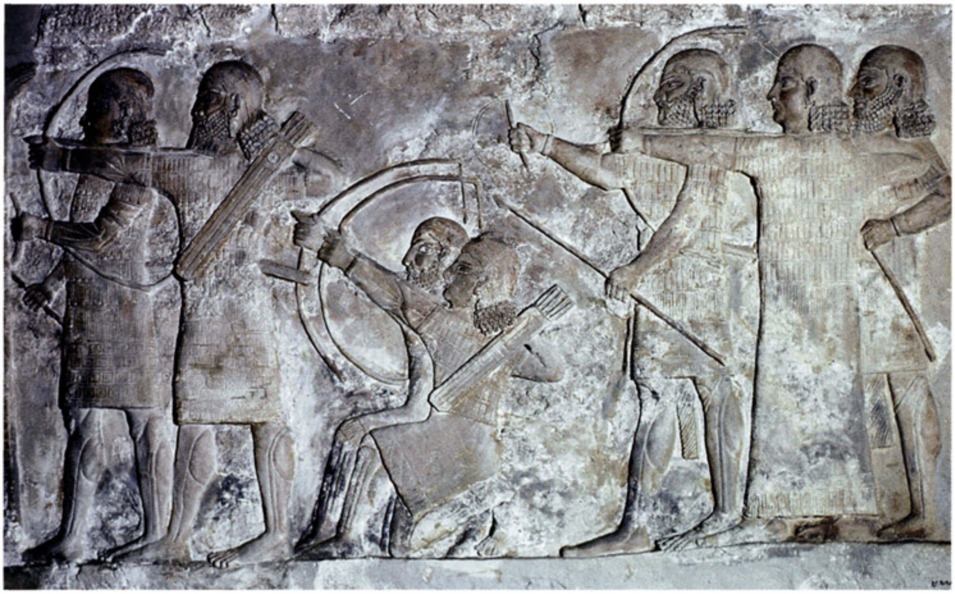
The first historical mention of the Mada (Medes) was made by Assyrian King Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BC). Herodotus, writing in the 5th century BC, reported six distinct tribes of Medes scattered all across western Iran and the interior of the Iranian plateau.[69] The Parsua first settled in the same areas as the Medes in modern western Iran, specifically modern Kermanshah in Iranian Kurdistan. The last reference to the Parsua in the Kermanshah region was by the Assyrian King Sargon II.[70] Curiously, the next reference is made by Sennacherib (705–681 BC) who located the Parsua to the south near the Anshan, who were the allies of the anti-Assyrian Elamites in modern southwest Iran (Khuzistan and Fars). The specifics of this relocation from the northwest to the southwest of Iran are unclear. One possibility is that as the Parsua were moving with the Medes towards western Iran, a group of them splintered off and went towards Elam in the southwest.[71] A more intriguing possibility is that the words "Parsua," "Parsa," and "Parthia" are derived from Old Iranian *parasava* (lit. frontier, side, rib).[72] In this theory, the Persians were a frontier people of the Medes. The Parsua in Media, the Parsa bordering Elam, and the Parthians bordering Central Asia were all located on the frontiers of the Mede Empire. This is somewhat similar to the origins of the name "Ukraine," which is originally a Slavic word for "the borderland." The linguistic hypothesis of *parasava* is not universally accepted, but what is agreed upon is that the Medes and Persians were very close culturally and linguistically, as noted by Strabo who reported that "Persia and Media ... these speak approximately the same languages with but small variations."[73]

Assyrian campaigns

The Assyrian Empire (1813–612 BC) was the military superpower of its day. Its strides in architecture, arts, technology, and militaria influenced the civilizations of the Near East, especially the Babylonians. Much of this was to be absorbed by the Medo-Persian Achaemenid Empire and resulted in the onset of a mutually influencing cultural intercourse between the Mediterranean world and western Asia that would last for thousands of years.

The Assyrians made military expeditions into Egypt, Asia Minor, and the Caucasus where they captured and deported the inhabitants and their possessions. Assyrian inscriptions note that over 4.5 million people were deported from their homelands between 750 and 620 BC, these being uprooted and scattered throughout West Asia. Although the numbers appear to be inflated, they go a long way to explaining the presence of a vibrant Jewish community in Babylon at the time of its conquest by Cyrus the Great. Assyrian deportations of Jews to Media,[74] especially during the reigns of Sargon II and





LEFT Assyrian archers from the palace of Sargon II at Khorasabad, 8th century BC. The later Medo-Persian Achaemenids combined the separate contingents of Assyrian archers and infantry into a single force, with unsatisfactory results against the hoplites of Greece. (Silvio Fiore, Topham Picturepoint, Topfoto)

OPPOSITE The victory stele of Naram-Sin, depicting the Akkadian king campaigning against the mountain warriors of western Iran who may be Kurds or Medes. Rose limestone stele (2230 BC), originally from Mesopotamia, found in Susa, Iran. (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

Sennacherib, are still reflected thousands of years later with the presence today of Jewish communities in Iran, notably Hamadan.

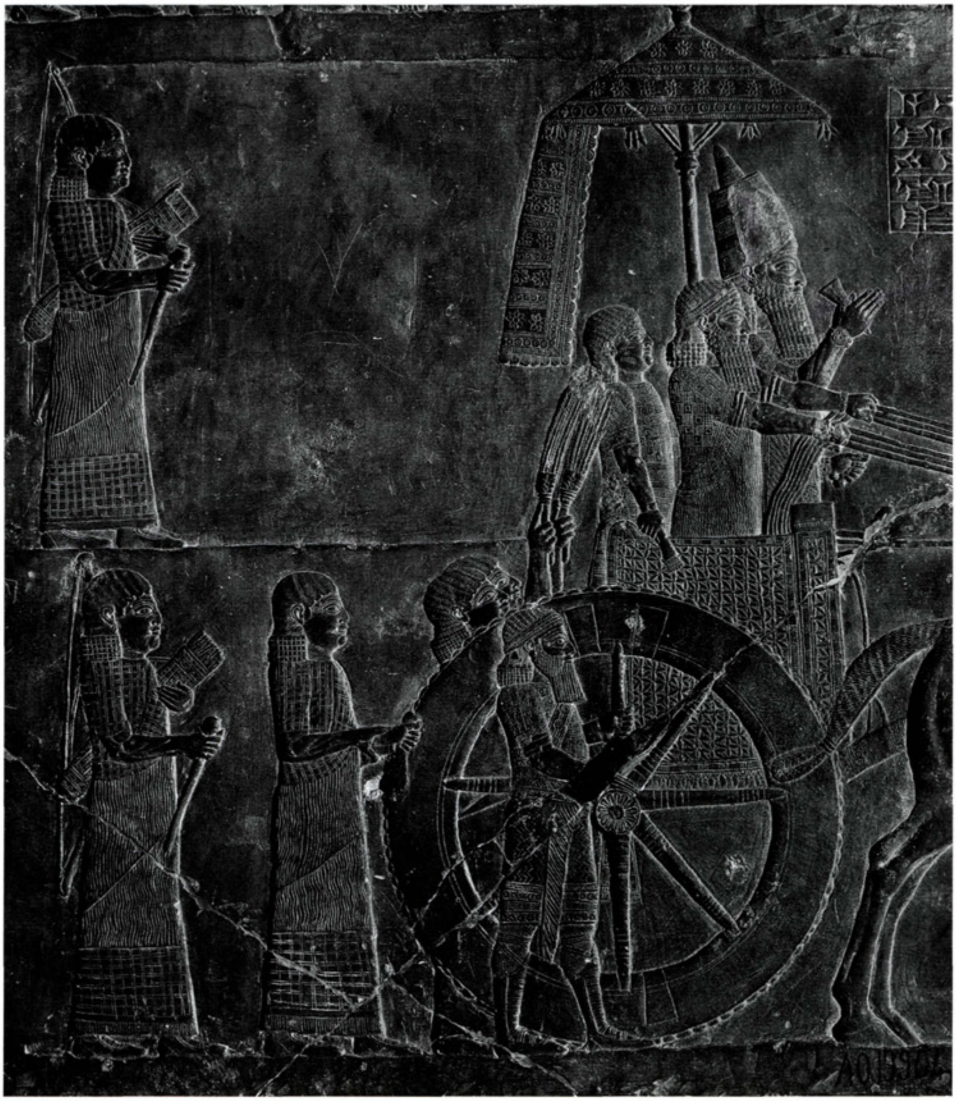
The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III had campaigned on the Iranian plateau and encountered the Medes and Persians. Queen Semiramis of Assyria and her son Adad-Nerari III (811–783 BC) conducted large-scale raids inside Iran, which then ceased until the ascension of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BC). By this time, the Aryan tribes were gaining strength on the plateau; the kingdom of Elam in southwest Iran was also attracting the military attentions of the Assyrians. Between the years of 743 and 730 BC, Tiglath-Pileser organized large cavalry raids, penetrating into Iran's interior in the northwest, near modern Tabriz.[75]

The motives for Assyrian expansions into Iran were often economic. Mede tribute-bearers on wall-reliefs in Nimrud are shown bringing horses as tribute to the Assyrians, most likely of the large and powerful Nisean breed. The lucrative trade routes that crossed the Iranian plateau to the east were a source of contention between the Assyrians and the Urartians.[76]

Iranian influences on Assyrian cavalry

Early Near Eastern cavalry were obliged to utilize two riders; one holding the reins, one firing arrows, very similar to the rider-warrior pair in chariots. Interestingly, early Arab camel-borne warriors engaged by the Assyrians, and later used as allied contingents by the Achaemenids, also relied on the two-man rider-warrior pair system. The Aryan peoples had mastered the martial art of firing from horseback during the early Iron Age (or perhaps earlier). The rider simultaneously controlled the horse and launched missiles. Once invented, horse archery spread amongst Aryan peoples in Central Asia, Ukraine and the Iranian plateau by the latter part of the 1st millennium BC. Perhaps the earliest visual representation of a Mede cavalryman utilizing the "Parthian shot," the skill of firing arrows backwards while controlling a horse in full gallop, is in the Assyrian palace of Nimrud.[77]

The chariot now became obsolete. The Aryan cavalryman wielded the same firepower as a two-man and two-horse chariot. Cavalry were more agile, mobile, and maneuverable than chariots, especially in rough terrain. The superiority of Aryan horse archery was brutally demonstrated to the Assyrians in 704 BC, when King Sargon II was killed in battle against the Cimmerians on the northern frontier. It is generally agreed that "Assyrian armies were basically infantry armies"[78] in contrast to the Iranians of the early part of the first millennium BC, which operated large cavalry forces with the capability to "inflict defeats on the less maneuverable Assyrian charioteers."[79] It was not until 679 BC that the Assyrians were finally able to check the Cimmerian advances into Assyria. The militarily astute Assyrians realized that they required fast-moving cavalry of their own to keep the Aryans at bay. The first step was to recruit Cimmerians to fight for them as mercenary cavalry.[80] By the early 7th century BC, Assyrian cavalrymen had mastered the art of mounted combat. Early Assyrian cavalry



The formidable eight-spoked Assyrian heavy chariot, here shown on a 7th-century BC carving from Nineveh, was ultimately outclassed by the cavalry of the Medes. (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto) carried the composite bow, daggers, and perhaps a rudimentary mace, they wore no armor except bronze helmets, and carried circular shields. The Assyrian cavalry force continued to evolve into a more militarily sophisticated and formidable force, with Tiglath-Pileser III introducing lamellar bronze corselets and spears. Sargon II reportedly fielded 1,000 cavalry of the late Assyrian type. The late Assyrian cavalry at Elam in 655 BC wore heavier armor and footwear, and carried lances, as well as the composite bow.

The Medes, at least according to Assyrian depictions, deployed early horse archers, relying on rapid strike-retreat tactics. Mede horse archery tactics may have been one of the reasons why the late Assyrian cavalry were provided with fabric armor. The Medes also fielded armored cavalry of the Saka type in which the warriors wore plate armor.[81] The Assyrians, however, did not further develop the notion of the cavalry-based army.

The Median Kingdom

Deioces was the first independent king of an organized kingdom of the Medes, though there is much controversy as to the extent of his importance in founding the Mede kingdom. His authority certainly did not extend over all Medes and Persians on the Iranian plateau, but was limited to a region near northwest Iran.[82] Deioces, cited as "Dahyuka of the Misi" (a Mannaean province) in the Sargon records, was exiled with his family by Sargon II to Syria by 715 BC.[83] Sargon II extended the Assyrian Empire to "the far mountain of Bikni" (Mount Demavand near Tehran) by 715–713 BC and built a number of outposts, one of which was called "Tah-a-Ran," present-day Tehran (Aramaic for "the place to which I shall return"). Sargon also organized Assyrian provinces in Median-ruled Iran. These successes, however, failed to subdue the Median and Persian horse archers of the Iranian plateau. Assyrian cavalry never established the same level of undisputed military dominance over their Aryan adversaries as they had over much of West Asia. The Assyrians also proved unable to break the tough Mede mountain infantry guerrilla fighters of modern Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, the precursors of the *Peshmerga* (lit. those who court death/sacrifice their lives).

By the mid-7th century BC, the Medes were not only able to resuscitate their kingdom, but also to expand it for the first time under Phraortes (Fravartish) (674–653 BC), although he never conquered Persis.[84] Among his achievements was the building of the Median capital of Ecbatana (Hamadan). Although much remains to be excavated with respect to Mede archeology, it is generally agreed that the Medes were highly sophisticated engineers as indicated by the ruins of Nush-e-Jan and other Median sites at places such as Kangavar (Iranian Kurdistan), Malayir (Hamadan province), and Borujerd (Luristan) in western Iran.[85]

The Scythian arrivals (652–625 BC)

The Scythians (Saka Paradraya) invaded the Crimea in the period 780s–750s BC where they surrounded and destroyed the main body of Cimmerians in the Ukraine.[86] Cimmerian survivors (pursued closely by the Scythians) fled to the Caucasus where they defeated the kingdom of Urartu in 710 BC. From Urartu, the Cimmerians entered the Near East, continually harassed by the Scythians, who in the course of 30 years pushed them onto the borders of the mighty Assyrian kingdom. The Cimmerians finally settled in Anatolia, notably in Cappadocia and Phrygia. The legacy of the Cimmerians endures in the name "Crimea" in the southern Ukraine, along the Black Sea coast.

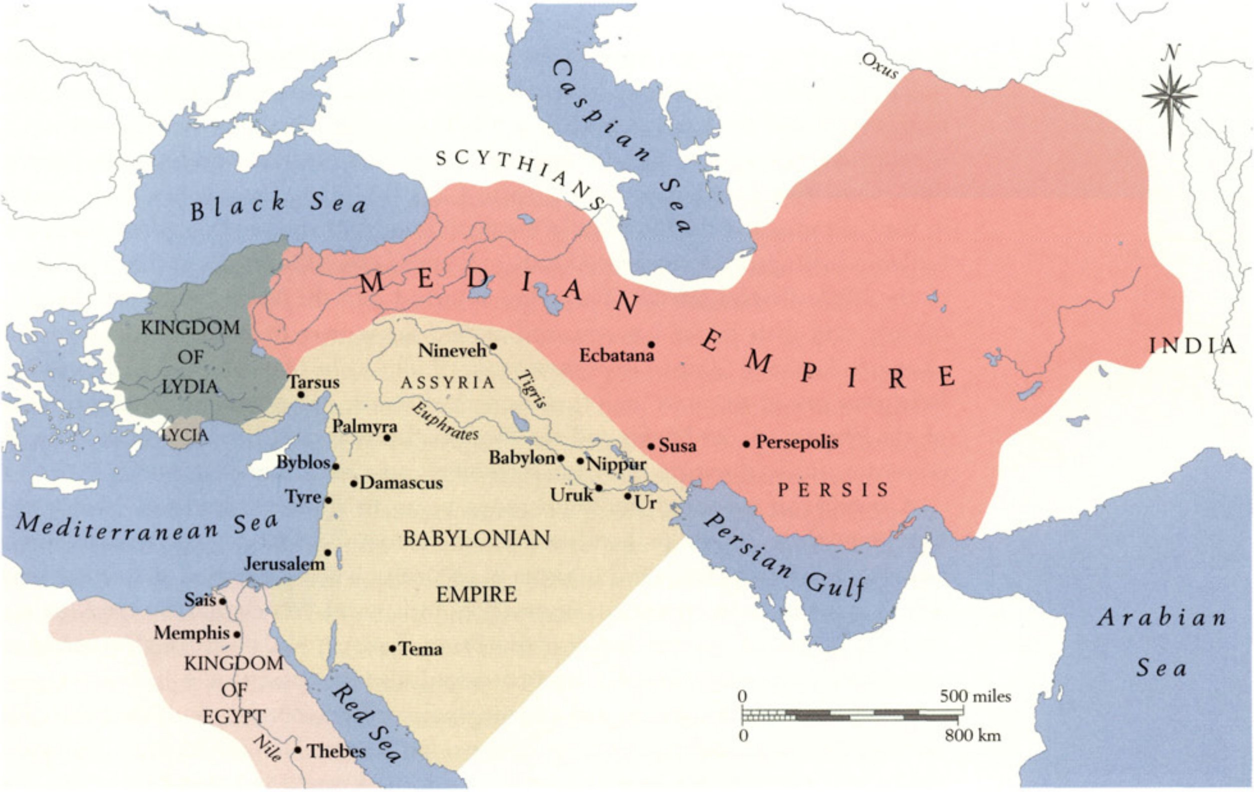
Like the Cimmerians fleeing before them, the Scythians entered the Near East through the Caucasus; remains of their arrowheads have been unearthed in the ancient Urartian Karmir Blur palace in Armenia.[87] The Scythians traveled through the Derbend Pass, emerging on the shores of Lake Urmia in Azerbaijan. They appear to have reached Assyria's borders by the late 650s/early 640s BC. Unable to subdue the Medes on the Iranian plateau, the Assyrians formed an anti-Mede military pact with the Scythians.[88] Median King Phraortes' forces were attacked and defeated in Iranian Azerbaijan by the Scythians, led by Madyes, the son of the Scythian king Protothyes.[89] Scythian rule reputedly came to a dramatic end when the Median king Cyaxares (son of Phraortes) invited Scythian noblemen to a banquet in *c.*625, during which he had them all slain.[90] Cyaxares' *coup d'etat* was well timed, as Assyrian power on the Iranian plateau was also weakening, leaving a power vacuum soon to be occupied by a powerful union of Aryan tribes.

Most scholars agree on the Iranian character of the Scythians and their linguistic and ethnic kinship to the Medes and Persians.[91] As noted by Cotterell: "the close relations of the Scythians (Saka) with the Persians is perhaps most illustrative … in the fact that the Scythians and Persians spoke closely related languages and understood each other without translators."[92]

The Scythians became the partners of the Medes and the Persians in the Achaemenid Empire, and the later Parthian dynasty (247 BC–AD 224) could trace its roots to the Scythians. The closeness of the material, linguistic and intellectual cultures of the Medo-Persians with the Scythians and other closely related peoples is attested in Greco-Roman sources.[93] To the non-Aryan neighbors of the Iranians in West Asia, the Medes and the Scythians were probably indistinguishable.[94]

Bronze harness ring from Luristan, 10th–7th centuries BC. (© The British Museum/ HIP/ Topfoto)

The Median Empire 550 BC


Black Sea
Caspian Sea
SCYTHIANS
Oxus
MEDIAN EMPIRE
KINGDOM OF LYDIA
LYCIA
Tarsus
Nineveh
ASSYRIA
Tigris
Euphrates
Ecbatana
INDIA
Palmyra
Byblos
Damascus
Tyre
Babylon
Nippur
Uruk
Ur
Susa
Persepolis
PERSIS
Mediterranean Sea
BABYLONIAN EMPIRE
Jerusalem
Sais
Memphis
KINGDOM OF EGYPT
Nile
Thebes
Red Sea
Tema
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
0 500 miles
0 800 km
N

By this time the equestrian gear, weapons, and culture of the Aryans in the Caucasus, Iran, and the Ukraine were highly similar. Archeological finds have indicated that the Scythians used three-lobed arrowheads, examples of which have been found at Kurgan sites from the Ukraine and all the way through Iranian Azerbaijan and western Iran. This type of arrowhead also appeared in the later armies of Achaemenid Persia. Iranian or Aryan influences on the Assyrian as well as Babylonian cavalry appeared in the form of specialized Scythian headgear – high-pointed caps, known as *karballatu* in Babylonian. The karballatu was to become a regular feature of the Medo-Persian Achaemenid cavalry.[95] Herodotus placed the Orthokorybantioi Scythian tribe in Media, their name being a direct translation of the Iranian word *tigrakhauda* (lit. pointed hat).[96] Diakonov has identified them not only in Media but also Asia Minor, as recently as the Byzantine era.[97] The Assyrians who fought the Urartians to their north encountered warriors who, like themselves, used bronze-tipped arrowheads of the Scythian type.[98] Iranian- or Aryan-style equestrian equipment (e.g. leather straps) was also seen among the late Babylonian cavalry of Nabonidus.[99]

The Luristan bronze and iron weapons industry

There are a number of important archeological sites dated to the pre- and post-Aryan arrivals, such as Hasanlu, Sialk, Khurvin, Kaluraz, Gheitarieh, Marlek, and Luristan.[100] The craftsmen of those sites constructed excellent weapons which may have influenced the course of martial technology in the Near East, and neighboring Mesopotamia in particular. The contributions by those regions were a major factor in the rise of the Mede and Achaemenid empires. As space does not permit a thorough discussion of all these sites, a brief survey is made of the development of arts and technology in Luristan.

The Lullubi of modern-day Iranian Kurdistan and Luristan faced the Semitic peoples to their west and the Kassites to their south. While their language is as yet unknown, it is believed that they were distinct from the Semitic and Hurrian worlds. To their north, the Lullubi shared borders with the Caspian-Cadusians of the Caspian Sea, the Urartians in the Caucasus, and the Hurrians in northern Iraq.[101] At the height of their power, the Lullubi challenged the ancient Akkadian Empire, especially in 2300–2200 BC, prior to the Medo-Persian arrivals. They were absorbed into the Mede Empire by the early 600s BC and their legacy has remained among the western Iranians, notably with the name of "Lur" and "Lur-istan" as well as the "Lullu" tribe of the Kurds.[102] Luristan was to become one of the most important centers where the Aryans were to form the genesis of the empires of the Medes and the Persians. Luristan also became a major cultural center for the development of Aryan mythology, arts, and weapons technology.

A number of advanced ironsmith shops began to appear in Luristan, Media, and Kurdistan; these appear to have used many "modern" methods (e.g. accordion-style bellows). In western Persia, and Luristan in particular, a new generation of furnaces were able to generate the temperatures necessary to melt metal. Mining quickly spread in the resource regions of western and northern Persia. Luristan blades set a high standard of workmanship. Examination of a Luristan sword blade revealed that it had virtually no slag (less than 4% iron oxide) and a homogenous carbon content. Given the traditional methods of pre-modern metallurgy, it is not yet known how the Luristan craftsmen produced the high temperatures necessary over a given period (e.g. 2552°F/1400°C for 40 hours plus) to produce such blade quality. High-quality short swords began to appear among the Aryan tribes of northern Iran by 1000 BC. By 900 BC, proto-Persian Aryan tribes were producing sturdier sword handles with the possible intention of stabilizing thrusting motion during hand-to-hand combat. Equivalent levels of craftsmanship were to be also found in ancient Greece, Syria, and the Ukraine (Kislovodsk). Nearly a thousand years later, Sassanian swords continued the Luristan tradition of blade excellence. Luristan axe-heads and whetstone blades were decorated with the Scythian animal motifs.[103] Finally, many types of early Mesopotamian and Assyrian bows can be traced to the Scythian settlers of Luristan,[104] a region that has yielded a very large number of high-quality bronze arrowheads.[105]

Uniting the Aryans

Classical historians note the close cultural and linguistic ties between the Aryans in the Near East, Afghanistan, and in Central Asia. According to Strabo,

> The name of Ariana is further extended to a part of Persia and Media as also to the Bactrians and Soghdians to the north, for these speak approximately the same language with but slight variations.[106]

Up to the time of Cyaxares (624–585 BC), the Aryan tribes in Media, Persis, the Iranian plateau and Central Asia were only connected by language and culture; no federation or political unity was yet in existence. This situation resembles that of the Greek city-states in Europe and Anatolia who, despite their common Hellenic heritage, were independent for centuries before eventually coalescing into a single state.

Although Herodotus attributes the unifying of Iranian tribes to Phraortes, it was most likely achieved later by his son Cyaxares. The Medes transformed the broad and loose cultural and linguistic unity of the Aryans known as Eire-an or Iran (lit. the land of Aryans) into a political, economic, and military union of Aryans under a single monarchy. The Scythians, too, become assimilated with their Iranian-speaking cousins in Media and supported them against the Assyrians. The kingdom of the Persians was also brought under the rule of the Medes, as Cyaxares subjected them to his authority by 625 BC.[107]

By this time, much of Elamite political authority in modern day Fars and Khuzistan had been destroyed by the Assyrians. At its height, the ancient Elamite kingdom (2700–539 BC) had encompassed much of southwest Iran. The Elamites were ethnic Elamo-Dravidians, with a distinct culture and civilization.[108] Though the Elamites fought against the rising power of Assyria, Assyria gained the upper hand, destroying the capital, Susa, in 640 BC.[109] While Elam maintained its powerful culture and identity, its political and military influence never recovered. These wars were coincident with the arrival of Iranian peoples such as the Sagarthians, Medes, and the Persians, who had now entered the Iranian plateau. The Persians intermarried with the Elamites and a powerful symbiosis emerged by 600 BC. Elam accepted the kingship of Median king Cyaxares and became a semi-independent border kingdom.[110] Elam was politically annexed into the Persian Empire by 539 BC. The architectural and artistic traditions of the Elamites were now passed to the Persians, and the Elamite pantheon and priesthood was respected by the magi. Significantly, the Elamite language became one of the official languages of the Persian Empire and was the language of administration in Persis.[111]

Cyaxares also conquered the anti-Mede Mannai by 616 BC, who were assimilated into the Iranian realm. Urartu had by now become too weak to seriously threaten Assyria or the Medes. Militarily, these circumstances did not bode well for Assyria, as its entire eastern flank was now dominated by a united coalition of Aryans being organized into a professional and aggressive military force known as the *Spada*.

The formation of the Spada

The Median *Spada* (lit. army) or *Taxmaspada* had been formally reorganized,[112] and most likely adopted some of the general organizational characteristics of the Assyrian army, elements that passed on to the succeeding Achaemenid Empire. The origins of the professional Spada are to be found in the *Kara* (lit. people) or "people's army," a designation applied to the early armies of Cyrus the Great. The Achaemenids became the heirs of Mede military tradition and terminology.[113] By the early 600s BC, the Median military of King Cyaxares fielded powerful well-trained and well-led *asabari* (lit. horse-bearers) cavalry forces.[114] The asabari were instrumental in overthrowing the Assyrian Empire, in concert with the Babylonians and the Scythians. In addition to cavalry, Cyaxares also organized separate contingents of archers (*anuvaniya*), spearmen (*rsika*) and also raised at least one battalion of siege-engines.[115] The infantry (*pasti*), recruited from Iran's resident peasant population, were modeled on Assyrian types. Mede weaponry also underwent changes.[116]

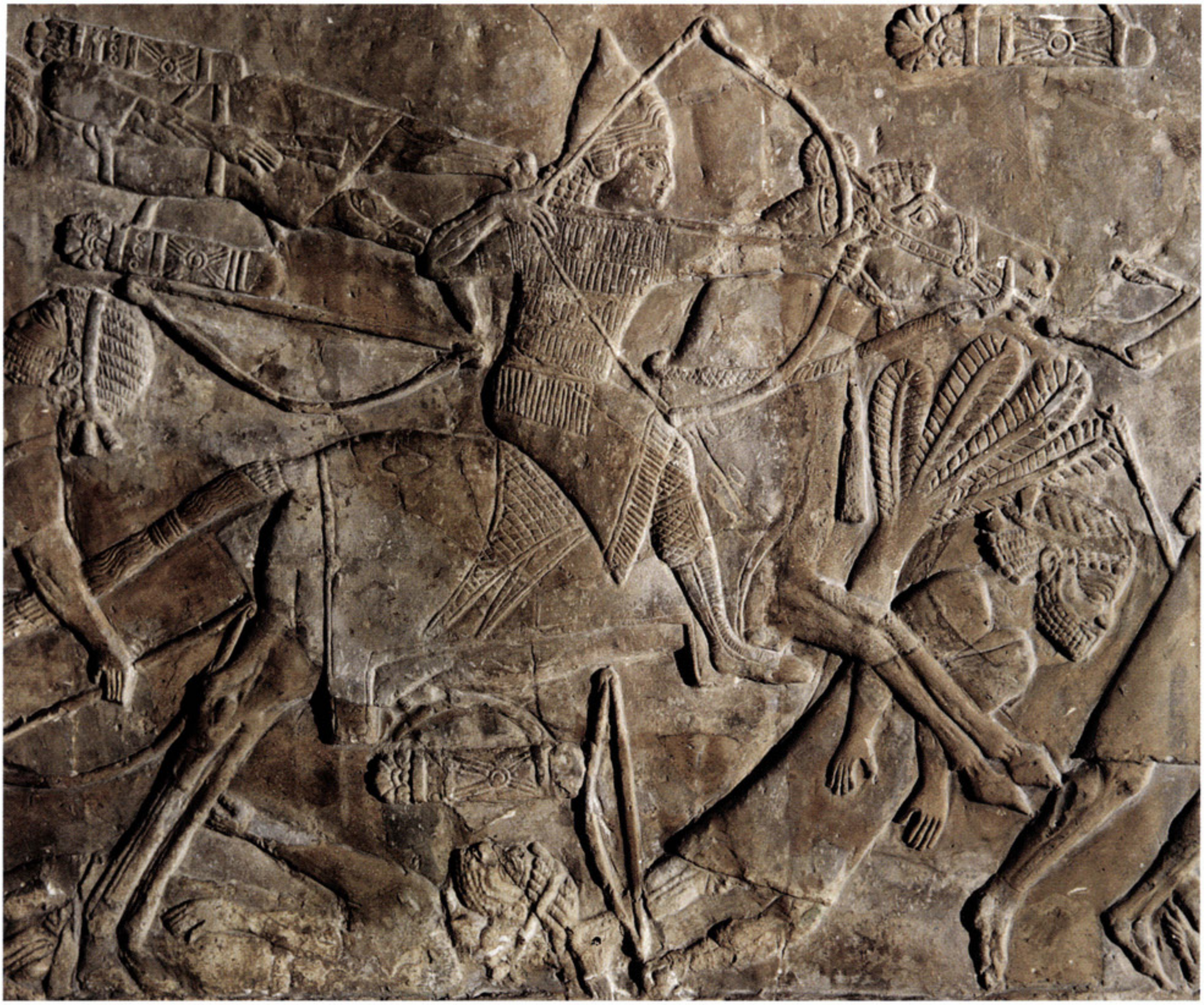
Archeological finds of Median equestrian gear include bridle pieces and iron harnesses constructed of bronze as well as iron. The most valuable Median steeds were the famous "Nisean" breeds from the south of Hamadan, the largest of these breeds stood around 13.1 hands (1.36m) high. It was the Nisean breed that gave rise to the powerful steeds of the Parthian and Sassanian heavy cavalry. The later Persepolis reliefs of Median noblemen depict the costume as a long-sleeved tunic, a leather jacket or tunic, tight-fitting trousers, and soft (possibly leather) half-boots. This type of dress predominated amongst Iranian peoples who had by now settled in eastern Anatolia, the Iranian plateau, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The Medes also introduced headgear with cheek pieces and a neck guard to the wider Iranian realm. The formalization of equestrian decorative arts in Persia can also be attributed to the Medes. The Persepolis reliefs of a horse from a Mede delegation show the steed with a knotted tail and decorated mane. This may have been an indication of rank, prestige, or status.

A key element in the rise of Mede military power was in Cyaxares' incorporation of the Scythians now resident in northern and western Iran. By this time, many Cimmerians and Scythians were being expelled from Anatolia into northwestern Iran by a resurgent Lydian kingdom. This translated into a larger pool of cavalry for the Spada. It was these Scythians who were to prove vital in the development of equestrian and archery skills of the Medes and upcoming Achaemenid Empire. Herodotus, for example, notes that Cyaxares entrusted the archery training of his children to the Scythians.[117] The Medes became excellent archers, as corroborated by Greek poet Simonides who characterized them as being "the best throwers of arrows." Scythian cavalry traditions further reinforced the southern (Iranian plateau) and northern (steppe-Central Asian) Iranian axis, a relationship that allowed for the transmission of cultural and military developments across a vast Eurasian landmass.

The fall of Assyria and Urartu

At this time Babylon, though unsubdued by Assyria, was militarily contained and could not pose a threat by itself. However, an alliance between the Iranian federation of Cyaxares and Babylon's King Nabopolassar altered the strategic situation against Assyria, leaving it dangerously vulnerable to its east and south. The north frontier was already vulnerable due to the decision of the Assyrian high command to abandon Anatolia, particularly after the Cimmerian arrivals in the 700s. In 626 BC, Babylon declared its total independence from Assyria. King Nabopolassar marched into Assyria, besieged the city of Assur by 615 BC but failed to capture it. The Medes supported the Babylonians by attacking Assyria from the east and raiding Kirkuk in the same year. Cyaxares returned in 614 BC, marching south past Nineveh and capturing Assur. The Assyrian Empire was doomed. By 612 BC, the Babylonian-Iranian (Mede-Scythian[118]) coalition reached the fortress-city of Nineveh, which fell after a three-month siege. There was one last Assyrian stronghold at Harran, which held out with Egyptian support until 610 BC.[119] The last vestiges of Assyrian authority were stamped out by the end of the century. Assyrian lands were now partitioned between Babylon and Media. The greatest military machine and most efficient state machinery ever produced by humanity was now extinguished from the arena of history.

The Urartians are first reported in the 1270s BC by the Assyrians as being a series of tribal coalitions.[120] Though hailing from the Caucasus and sharing the same linguistic



The Assyrian Empire was influenced by the cavalry of the Medes, Cimmerians and Saka Paradraya. The Assyrian cavalry subsequently became a highly professional force during Sargon II's reign, raiding Medo-Aryan realms as far east as modern Tehran. (R Sheridan, Ancient Art and Architecture)

origins as the Hurrians, the Urartians were distinct from them. The name Urartu is Akkadian in origin, meaning "mountain nation." The inhabitants called their nation Biailini (the original name of Lake Van). At their height, the Urartians were in control of much of Georgia, Armenia, Iranian Azerbaijan, and northern Mesopotamia, and their authority may have extended to the Black Sea.[121] By the time of the Mede arrivals, the Urartian boundaries had receded to a region essentially located between the three lakes of Sevan, Urmia, and Van. The long wars with Assyria[122] had gradually sapped the kingdom's strength. By 714 BC, Urartian power was decisively crushed by Assyria's Sargon II. The final destruction of Urartu occurred during the reign of Cyaxares with the capital Tuspa (modern Van) falling into Mede hands by 609 BC.[123] The fall of Urartu was not exclusively the result of Mede military actions, as the kingdom had already been severely weakened as a result of the aforementioned Scythian invasion by 590 BC.[124]

The Urartians left a profound legacy on Iranian crafts, metalwork, and architecture.[125] However, the true heirs of Urartu were the Armenians. The Armenians assimilated the indigenous Caucasian peoples, namely the Urartians and Hurrians, as well as the Indo-European speaking (Hittite) Luwians and north Iranian Scythians. All of these were soon Armenisized leading to a homogenized culture, history, and language, one that was to be greatly intertwined with Persia for centuries.[126] It is possible that the name of the mountain of Ararat is derived from Urartu. Modern Georgia is also heir to a powerful Urartian legacy and has seen much cultural intercourse with Persia as recently as the late AD 1700s.[127]

Cyaxares thrusts into Anatolia

The Book of Jeremiah is clear in noting that the Urartians and the Mannaeans were now under the dominion of the Medes.[128] In the meantime, a small Scythian kingdom had survived in Iranian Azerbaijan. Cyaxares was determined to end the independence of this minor kingdom. By 590 BC, a combined Mede-Scythian force stormed the petty kingdom, obliging these Scythians to move west towards the Lydian kingdom of King Alyattes (619–560 BC). Cyaxares' demand to Alyattes for the repatriation of these Scythians was refused, leading to war. Cyaxares' spada successfully captured Cappadocia in eastern Anatolia, pushing Lydian boundaries towards western Anatolia. Cyaxares, however, was unable to subdue Lydia, especially the renowned Lydian cavalry lancers. The long wars against Assyria and in the Caucasus had exhausted the spada. The military stalemate continued until the occurrence of an eclipse on May 28, 585 BC was taken as an omen by both sides. Fighting was suspended and mediation offers by the Babylonian and Cilician kings were accepted. The Medo-Lydian frontier was set at the Halys River (modern Qizil Irmaq) roughly midway between west and east Anatolia. The pact was cemented by the marriage of Cyaxares' son, Astyages, to Alyattes' daughter Aryenis. King Nebuchadnezzar II married Astyages' daughter Amytis, resulting in a Babylonian-Median-Lydian balance of power that was to remain in place until the rise of Cyrus the Great.

Astyages (584–549 BC) was the last king of Media, and under him the empire attained its greatest extent. While Cyaxares had focused on expanding the empire along its non-Iranian west, Astyages successfully expanded to the east. The eastern Iranians in modern-day Khorassan, Afghanistan, Dragiania (Baluchistan southwest Iran), and large parts of Central Asia were brought under the sway of the Medes with the Bactrians and much of the Saka becoming autonomous allies.[129] In the north, Hyrcania and the Cadusians who were contiguous to Arran in the Caucasus (modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan) accepted Median suzerainty, although this may have happened under Cyaxares. In the south, the Persian Gulf coastline was by now under Mede authority, especially Persis and Elam.

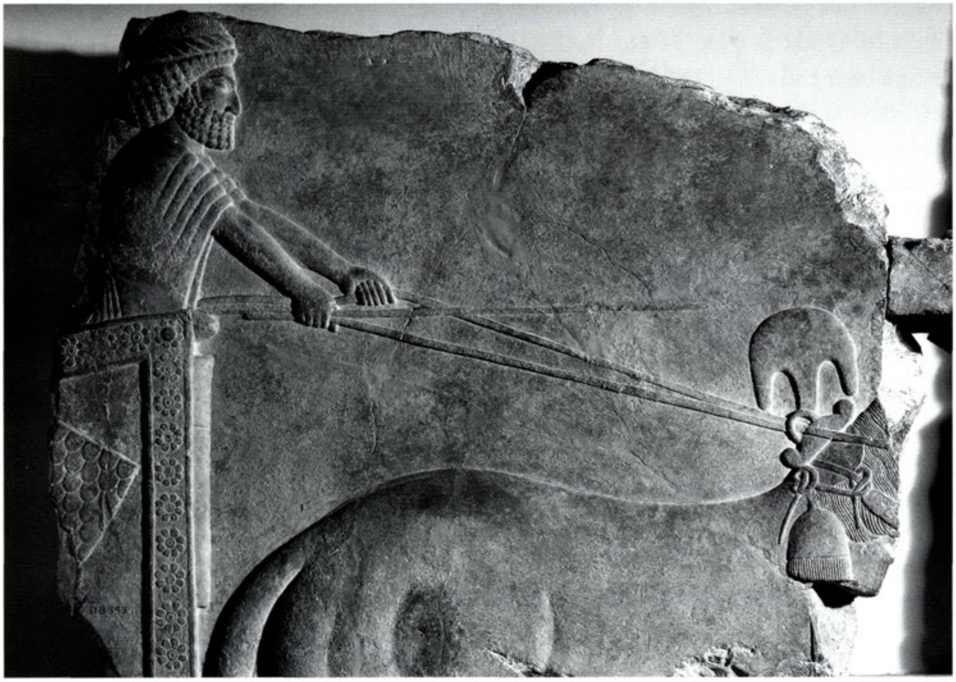
Chapter 2

Cyrus the Great and the early Achaemenids

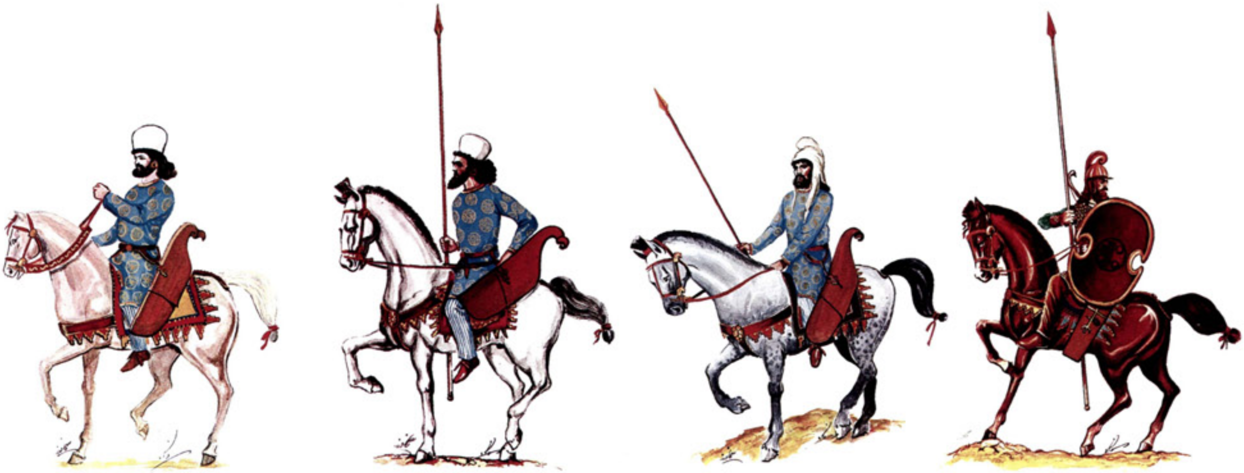
The rise of Cyrus the Great

By 559 BC, the Near East was ruled by four major powers: the Median Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Lydian kingdom in Anatolia, and Egypt. These had remained on cordial terms after the destruction of Assyria in 612 BC. The Medes seemed content at maintaining the status quo, a strategic situation that was to change radically with the ascension of Cyrus.

The foundation of the Achaemenid dynasty can be traced back to Hakhamanesh, or Achaemenes, who ruled the Aryan tribes of Persis in the 7th century BC, at the time when Assyria was at the peak of her might. Achaemenes' son was Teispes, who in turn



Stone relief of an Achaemenid royal chariot, which originally decorated a staircase on the east wing of the north side of the Apadana at Persepolis. (© The British Museum/ HIP/Topfoto)



These illustrations are from an extremely rare illustrated book on the military of Persia published in 1971 for the 2,500th anniversary of the Achaemenid Empire, and featuring illustrations of the ancient armies of Persia and photographs of the celebrations held at Persepolis to mark the occasion. From left to right: Median officer on horseback with bow-case and Median short sword, Mede cavalryman with lance, Median soldier in hooded dress, Median cavalryman wearing armor and carrying shield. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

divided Persis between his two sons, Ariaramnes and Cyrus I.[1] Ariaramnes ruled eastern Persis while Cyrus I governed western Persis, or Anshan. Cyrus I was succeeded by his eldest son Kambujiya I (Cambysis)[2] as the ruler of Anshan. Kourosh, or Cyrus II, the son of Kambujiya I, was born in *c.*575 BC.

Legends vary, and some even contradict Cyrus' royal origins, but historians agree that Kambujiya I was Cyrus' father, and that his mother was Princess Mandana,[3] daughter of Mede king Astyages. The latter's decision to marry his daughter to a petty local ruler in Persis was allegedly based on a dream.[4] Astyages then ordered Mandana's son, the infant Cyrus, to be murdered, an action again based on a dream in which he was told that the boy would one day overthrow him.[5] The assassination was entrusted to Harpagus, a Median general who, instead of murdering the infant Cyrus, hid him with a shepherd and his wife. Upon hearing of the insubordination, Astyages ordered Harpagus' son to be decapitated and served to Harpagus at a royal banquet. Enraged, Harpagus bided his time until Cyrus reached adulthood. Harpagus then visited Cyrus, revealed his royal lineage, and encouraged him to organize a rebellion against Astyages.

Cyrus II (575–530 BC) ascended the throne of Anshan by 559 BC. He soon conquered the Ariaramnes branch of the House of Achaemenes in east Persis, uniting all of Persis under his rule. Astyages had not viewed the power struggle in Persis with much alarm at first. This soon changed as Cyrus refused to recognize the authority of Astyages. Cyrus also worked at securing the allegiance of the Aryan tribes of the Iranian plateau, shifting the balance of power against Astyages. This forced Astygas to move against Cyrus by 550 or 549 BC.

It was at Murghab, roughly 400 miles (650km) south of the Median capital at Ecbatana, that Astyages and his army met his grandson in battle. Cyrus, however, had already won, as Astyages was unpopular with the Median troops he led. This is noted by Miller[6] who states that "Media was subdued by force and treachery" by Astyages. His efforts at centralizing the Median Empire may have alienated many of the Mede nobles, who staged a battlefield rebellion and shifted their allegiance to Cyrus with their troops.[7] This partly explains why there was so little prolonged fighting, as Herodotus cites only two battles.[8] The capital of the Medes at Ecbatana soon fell to Cyrus in 550 BC.

Cyrus took no acts of retribution against Astyages, treating his defeated grandfather with honor and respect.[9] As the Medes were close ethnic cousins of the Persians, they retained their posts in the government and army. It is no exaggeration to state that what took place at Murghab was not the downfall of the Median Empire, but a change in its management. The Parthians in northeast Iran (near Central Asia) and the Hyrcanians in northern Iran (beneath the Caspian) soon acknowledged the new leadership of Cyrus.[10] The leadership of the Iranian realm became Medo-Persian, followed soon by the northern Iranian Saka as partners of empire.[11] The cultural and ethnic closeness of the Medes and Persians has been forever immortalized in the Bible, as the books of Esther and Daniel both mention the Medes and the Persians as sharing the same laws.[12]

The Medes brought their valuable experience of statecraft and empire, an excellent army, and imperial court rituals to Cyrus II. Nevertheless, the Achaemenid state was not to be as centralized as its Median predecessor,[13] especially when the Empire expanded west into non-Iranian lands. The influence of the Medes would be such that the Elamite robe of the Persians was discarded in favor of Mede riding dress by the time of Darius I.

The Kara: the early armies of Cyrus the Great

Our main understanding of the Achaemenid military machine is derived from the artistic illustrations such as the Persepolis and Susa reliefs, the Alexander sarcophagus at Sidon, the Pompeii depictions of Darius III versus Alexander the Great,[14] the Oxus treasures, and other works of art.[15] Greek sources such as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Curtius Rufus as well as later Greco-Roman historians have also proved invaluable in helping modern historians reconstruct the Achaemenid military.

Kara is Old Persian for "imperial levy,"[16] "army" or "war," a Satem equivalent to the Lithuanian *karis* or *karias* (lit. war, army) and Germanic *harjis* (lit. army; modern High German *Heer*).[17] When Cyrus began his conquests, he had no actual "army" in the professional sense. The term "kara" referred to one's friends and kinsmen in one's local tribe. It was only after the overthrow of Cyaxares and the union of the Medes and Persians that the professional Median spada system became the basis of the Imperial Achaemenid army.[18]

The Achaemenids also inherited a powerful Assyrian legacy through the Medes. There was an overall similarity between the Achaemenid and earlier Assyrian organizational systems.[19] The practice of allocating land to professional soldiers also survived from Assyrian times; the Achaemenids allocated estates for their elite cavalrymen and archers, a practice that survived to late Sassanian and Islamic times. The Achaemenids may have also benefited from Assyrian siege technology including the battering ram, and Assyrian siege tactics such as sapping and scaling ladders and the use of massed archery and slingers from siege towers to divert defenders' attention away from combat engineers.

The role of the *hazarpatish* (lit. thousand leader), known to the Greeks as the *chiliarch*, is not altogether clear. It is generally agreed that the hazarpatish was a close confidant of the king,[20] responsible for the ceremonial palace reception of the king's guests, and for overseeing the royal treasury.[21] The office of the hazarpatish would have commanded three distinct portions of the military; the satraps (provincial governors), Elite Royal Guards, and foreign armies under Achaemenid vassalage. The hazarpatish fought alongside his men, often dying in battle.[22] By the end of the dynasty, the hazarpatish had gained increasing importance, his status becoming akin to a modern day prime minister.[23] There was also a select group of "friends" around the king[24] with varying levels of rank,[25] acting as his closest advisors in times of war or peace. Of perhaps greater interest is a group of spies known as the "eyes and ears" of the king[26] whose role was the collection of intelligence in the provinces and foreign territories.

Greek sources report the Empire holding annual reviews of troops throughout the garrisons of the realm.[27] The regions near Persepolis or other royal residences would be inspected by the king himself, whereas more remote regions near Central Asia, or Anatolia for example, would be inspected by members of the Achaemenid house. When the call for the annual review was issued, troops were ordered to arrive at pre-designated assembly areas.[28] The primary purpose of the military review was to inspect the discipline, equipment and battle-readiness of the troops. Satraps, base commanders, and even the hazarpatish were reviewed alongside their troops. Those units and commanders who excelled in the review were duly rewarded, whereas substandard units were punished.[29]

Early battle doctrine

The early Achaemenids fought only in daytime,[30] and initiated their expeditions in the spring[31] after the *Nowruz* (New Year Spring Equinox) festivals. Achaemenid tactics involved the coordination of a combined arms concept, centered on massed archery and rapid strikes. The archers, placed in the center, discharged their missiles, followed shortly afterwards by the slingers who would release loads of stones or lead. In theory this would disrupt enemy lines, allowing Cyrus' cavalry, usually situated on the flanks of the army, to engage in flanking movements or follow-up strikes. Early Achaemenid cavalry were more "shock troops" than close-quarter fighting troops, reliant on spears, javelins, and archery. While these had much in common with their Mede, Saka, and Cimmerian horse archer predecessors, they were not as yet a primary "breakthrough" force. Pastoral nomads such as the Dahae, Sagarthians, and Mardians most likely provided Cyrus' unarmored cavalry forces.

Standing close to the archers were the regular infantry, armed with the *akenakes* short sword and spears. They would be the last to proceed toward enemy lines, and their primary role was to eliminate any remaining opposition. Commanders who participated in battle were situated in the center of their units.[32] Many of the early Achaemenid "infantry" were highly trained archers who would also double up as infantry. The infantry and archers would form up behind large defensive wicker shields, much like the archers of the former Assyrian Empire. These close-quarter infantry would have fielded the akenakes short swords and spears for close-quarter combat. Achaemenid tactics proved overwhelmingly successful during the early conquests of Lydia and Babylon by Cyrus II and later by Xerxes in Egypt. The rapid and decisive nature of these early Achaemenid victories may have led to a false sense of military superiority, a belief shattered by the disastrous expeditions in Greece.

The conquest of Lydia

King Croesus of Lydia's initiation of war against Persia was to allegedly chastise Cyrus for his overthrow of Croesus' brother-in-law, Astyages, though in fact he probably wished to expand his kingdom's territory eastwards. Croesus may have also been thinking of a "pre-emptive strike" against a growing (and unpredictable) power to his east. Croesus' war with Cyrus was to cost him his kingdom.[33]

The Lydian army was mainly composed of armored infantry, including Ionian Greeks from the Aegean coast.[34] The cavalry were the mainstay of Lydian forces, distinguished in their expert use of lances from horseback. These were the greatest military threat to Cyrus' forces.[35] In 547 BC, Croesus invaded Cappadocia, under Iranian rule since the days of the Medes. From Cappadocia, Croesus could menace the Iranian plateau and Azerbaijan. Cyrus and his army crossed the Tigris River below the town of Arbela and advanced to face Croesus in the Pteria region of Cappadocia. The initial clash was apparently inconclusive. Croesus attributed his lack of success to the larger size of Cyrus' army and retired more or less intact towards his capital Sardis the next day. The auxiliary forces of Croesus' army were disbanded once Sardis was reached, an action based on the assumption that Cyrus' army would arrive there months later. In such a scenario, Croesus would be able to easily reconstitute his auxiliary forces and enlist the support of Spartan, Egyptian, and Babylonian allies against Cyrus. Croesus, however, grossly underestimated Cyrus' daring and initiative. Cyrus was aware of the disbanded Lydian auxiliaries at Sardis, as he had been following Croesus closely since the Pteria battle. His unexpectedly speedy arrival caught the Lydians by surprise, and Croesus was now forced to confront Cyrus in front of Sardis with a reduced force.

To neutralize the Lydian cavalry, Harpagus suggested to Cyrus an ingenious plan. Camels from the supply train were to be converted to military use. Cyrus placed his infantry behind the camel troops; the cavalry were to follow behind the infantry. The key to Harpagus' camel stratagem was the assumption that Lydian horses would lose cohesion at the sights, smells, and sounds of the strange beasts. The tactic succeeded and Lydian horses failed to maintain discipline and retired at the sight and smell of the camels. The Lydian riders were now forced to dismount and fight on foot. The "softening up" of Lydian lines by archery, and possibly slingers, would have allowed the cavalry to attack, with the infantry following up to mop-up the presumably broken Lydian lines.

Though defeated, enough Lydian troops remained to retire into Sardis, which was put to siege by Cyrus. The now desperate Croesus sent an urgent appeal to the Spartans for help. The request proved futile; Sardis fell after a 14-day siege.[36] The Lydian kingdom was now annexed into the new Achaemenid Empire. Cyrus treated Croesus with honor and granted him a high position in his court. As Cyrus went back to Ecbatana with Croesus in his entourage he entrusted the conquest of the Ionian Greeks along the Aegean Sea, as well as the Phrygians, Carians, and Lycians, to General Mazares, followed by Harpagus.[37] The capture of Lydia not only opened the territories of western Anatolia, but also provided Cyrus with a northern flank against the Babylonian Empire, whose days were now numbered.

The conquest of Babylon

When Babylonian King Nabonidus ascended the throne of Babylon in 556 BC, his kingdom had been allied to the Iranians for nearly 75 years. However, Cyrus' conquest of Lydia changed the strategic balance between the Iranians and Babylon dramatically, and Babylon was invaded by Cyrus in 539 BC.

Gold model of an Achaemenid chariot from the Oxus Treasure, 5th–4th century BC. (© The British Museum/ HIP/Topfoto)

A major factor facilitating Cyrus' conquest of Babylon was the unpopularity of Nabonidus amongst his own people, especially the priesthood. Nabonidus' interest in the northern Mesopotamian moon god Sen at Harran, and his neglect of sacred duties necessary for the Babylonian god Marduk had alienated the priesthood. Nabonidus departed for the deserts of northwest Arabia in 540 BC, where he took up residence in the oasis town of Taima. When Cyrus invaded Babylon, he found a population unwilling to support their king. Cyrus' diplomacy also won Gubaru (Ugbaru), the disaffected Babylonian governor of Gutium, over to the Achaemenids. Gubaru was a formidable general who had served the late Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BC). His military support was to prove decisive in Cyrus' conquest of Babylon.

The "Wall of Babylon" was, in fact, not the walled city of Babylon but the "Median Wall" between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, built by Nebuchadnezzar to block any potential Median thrust from Babylon's northwest. The right end of the wall (at the Tigris) was supported by the fortress-city of Opis. The left end (at the Euphrates) was guarded by Sippar. The Tigris River, which guarded much of the eastern flank of the routes leading to the city of Babylon, was a difficult natural barrier against any invading army from the east. The strategic situation of the Median Wall in 539 BC bears some resemblance to the Maginot Line in 1940 in France. Both were built under the assumption that the enemy would invade along predictable axes of advance leading towards built-up fortifications. In neither case was any provision made for the possibility that the enemy would simply outflank the "wall" from another direction. Cyrus had no intention of predictably attacking across the Akkadian plains and expending himself against the Median Wall. His plan was to outflank that wall by way of a northern thrust. Thanks to earlier diplomacy, Cyrus' troops would combine forces with the Babylonian contingents of Gubaru in a bid to strike at Opis and cross the Tigris, thereby outflanking the Median Wall to the southwest. Before striking Opis, Cyrus had to solve the problem of crossing the Tigris River to the rear of the fortress-city. Cyrus' engineers are described by Herodotus as having worked for months to divert the water at the Gynades tributary of the Tigris into many separate channels.[38]

The draining of the Tigris allowed Cyrus to storm Opis in October. Few military details are available regarding the fighting; however, the forces that Cyrus defeated appear to have been a mix of Nabonidus' regular army as well as Akkadian contingents. The capture of Opis and the crossing of the Tigris effectively outflanked the Median Wall. Once across the Tigris, Cyrus split his forces in two. He dispatched Gubaru's troops alongside Persian contingents southwards towards Babylon City. Cyrus himself thrust southwest towards Sippar, which was also captured. The Babylonian army was now neutralized.

There appears to have been little popular resistance against Cyrus, which allowed the speedy advance of Cyrus' forces into Babylon City. Nabonidus, who was now fleeing south, sought sanctuary in his capital, and was duly captured. The fall of Babylon City has been recorded as having been a peaceful and orderly affair, with Cyrus being welcomed as a liberator into the metropolis. This is corroborated by the Nabonidus Chronicle: "Cyrus entered Babylon ... the state of peace was imposed on all the city, Cyrus sent greetings to all Babylon."[39] It is certainly possible that pro-Cyrus

Soldiers of the Imperial Iranian army dressed as Achaemenid infantry units on parade at Persepolis on October 13, 1971 as part of the celebrations of the founding of the Achaemenid Empire 2,500 years before. A film was made of the celebrations, narrated by Orson Welles. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

Babylonian sympathizers may have helped Cyrus to secure the city. Cyrus entered the temple of Bel-Marduk and paid homage to the Babylonian god.[40] The fate of Nabonidus is difficult to ascertain. One account asserts that Cyrus was magnanimous to his captive and allowed him to retire in comfort, allegedly exiling him to German (modern Kerman). A contradictory version is provided by Xenophon (431–350 BC) who reports Nabonidus being assassinated by Cyrus' nobles in the great throne-room of Babylon.[41] If true, this may be explained by Cyrus' desire to placate the wishes of the Babylonian priesthood and populace.

Of all ancient civilizations bordering the former Babylonian Empire, only Egypt remained. Babylon itself was the richest prize to fall to Cyrus; Mesopotamia, with its sophisticated urban, mercantile, and learning traditions, now began a centuries-long symbiotic relationship with the Iranian plateau, itself linked to Central Asia and the Caucasus. The maritime cities of Syria, Palestine, and Phoenicia also pledged their loyalty to Cyrus after Nabonidus' fall. The Phoenician subjects of the former Babylonian kingdom were especially vital as their entire fleet was now incorporated into the Achaemenid Empire. It was this fleet that was used by Darius the Great to lay the basis of the world's first imperial navy. Cyrus' conquest of Babylon also terminated the one-thousand-year-long dominance of Mesopotamia by Semitic peoples. The Indo-European dominance of Mesopotamia was in turn broken by the Arabian warriors of Islam over one thousand years later.

The Cyrus Cylinder

Cyrus did not effect major changes to the local administration of Babylon and Lydia. His one innovation was the use of the Median model of organizing provinces, satrapies, each administered by a designated satrap. Cyrus' genius at government was his appreciation of the linguistic, religious, and human rights of all his subjects. Xenophon spoke highly of Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia,* describing him as void of deceit, arrogance, guile, or selfishness. Herodotus described Cyrus as a father figure whose sole concern was the welfare of the people. Cyrus is the first "one-world hero" in history, namely a ruler who sought to unite peoples into one empire while according full respect to all languages, creeds, and religious practices. Alexander, who greatly admired Cyrus, certainly adopted his mantle of the "world hero" after his conquests of Persia.

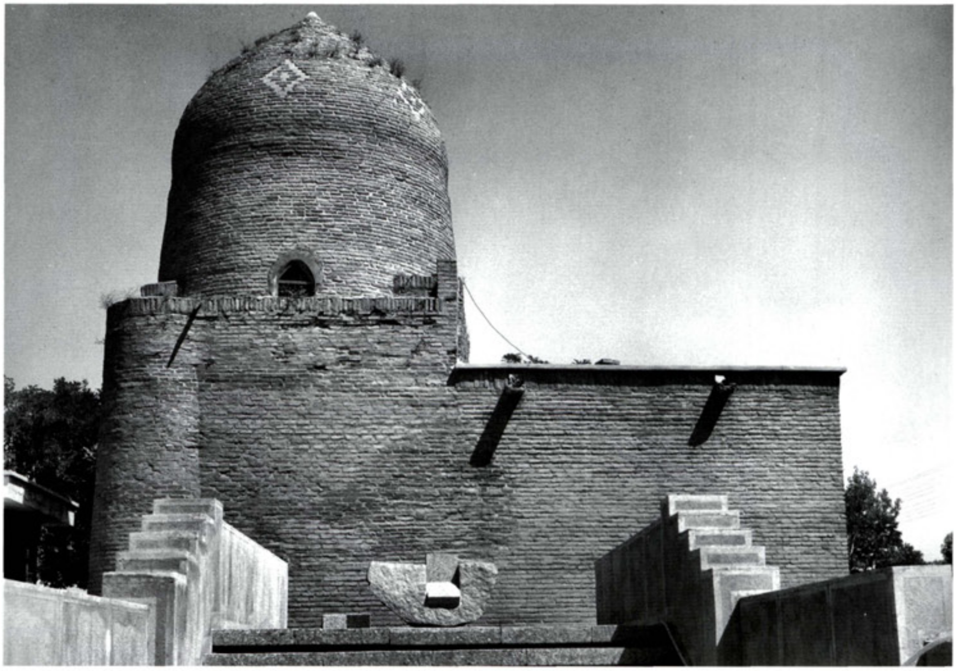
Cyrus' system of government has been forever immortalized by the Cyrus Cylinder. This is a clay cylinder of a decree that was issued by Cyrus the Great in 538 BC, shortly after his conquest of Babylon. The Cylinder is regarded as the first human rights charter in history. The original concept of the cylinder had been adopted from King Hammurabi of Babylonia. There were three main premises in the decrees of the Cyrus Cylinder: the political formalization of racial, linguistic, and religious equality; all deported peoples were to be allowed to return home; and all destroyed temples were to be restored. This allowed for the restoration of the native Babylonian temples and the destruction of those "false gods" deemed offensive to the priesthood. Cyrus showed a genuine interest in the welfare of the common people as local slums were soon cleared for housing projects. Cyrus' policies were also to have a profound impact upon the Jews, and were to influence the evolution of Judaism.

The Cyrus Cylinder, history's first true human rights proclamation that transcended the concepts of race, language, or religion. A replica of the Cyrus Cylinder now stands at the entrance of the United Nations building in New York City. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

Cyrus and the liberation of the Jews

Judah had revolted against the Babylonian Empire in 597 BC. Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar crushed the Jewish rebellion by sacking Jerusalem and destroying the Temple of Yahweh. A large number of Jews and their leadership were deported to Babylon. Earlier deportations by the Assyrians to Iran in the early 700s BC meant that the Jews of Iran were the earliest Hebrew settlers outside Judea, especially in Ecbatana, Media, and Susa. Jewish religious writings had forecast the destruction of Babylon.[42] When Cyrus defeated Nabonidus of Babylon, he officially declared the freedom of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. This was the first time in history that a world power had guaranteed the survival of the Jewish religion, customs, and culture. The Jews were to play a vital role in the trades and businesses of ancient Iran, enjoying complete cultural freedom.

It is believed that up to 40,000 Mesopotamian Jews returned to Israel. Cyrus also allowed them to rebuild their Temple and supported that reconstruction with an imperial stipend from the treasury. The Empire continued that support as indicated in a decree by Darius the Great in 519–518 BC.[43] The King also ordered sacred Hebrew artifacts confiscated earlier by Nebuchadnezzar to be restored to Jewish ownership. The generosity of Cyrus is reflected in the book of Isaiah where he is cited as "Yahweh's anointed."[44] Koresh, the Hebrew name for Cyrus, was hailed as a Messiah by the Jews. Isaiah describes Cyrus as "He is my Shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose."[45] Not all Jews chose to return to Jerusalem, as they had put down personal and mercantile roots in Mesopotamia. What changed with the arrival of Cyrus was their freedom of worship. The descendants of many of these Jews remained in Mesopotamia for over 2,000 years. Few are aware that close to one-third of the inhabitants of post-World-War-One Baghdad may have been Jewish.[46] The Biblical characters Ezra, Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai played historically important roles in the Persian court. Jews remained very loyal subjects of the Empire, even during those times when Syria and Egypt broke into rebellion.[47]



Tomb of Esther and Mordecai in Hamadan, northwest Iran. It is also possible that this site contains the remains of a Jewish queen of Sassanian Persia. Jews were highly honored by the Achaemenid rulers of Persia. (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)

Zoroastrianism: theological basis of Persian rule

The facts of the prophet Zoroaster's life are unclear, but his five basic principles are still known to this day. First is the concept of an all-powerful single god known as Ahura Mazda (the Supreme Angel). Second, Ahura Mazda stands for all that is good. Third, Ahriman is the supreme evil entity opposed to Ahura Mazda and his creations. Fourth, individual goodness is exemplified by good words, good deeds, and good thoughts. The fifth is the principle of personal choice; one's choosing between good and evil, thereby assuming personal responsibility for one's actions. The acceptance of Ahura Mazda was also a personal choice. This may explain why no forced conversions were undertaken in conquered lands and the gods of other nationalities were fully respected, as indicated by Cyrus' prostration towards Babylonian god Marduk. As noted by Graf, Hirsch, Gleason and Krefter, "Belief in a heavenly afterlife for good people and torment for evildoers may have been partly responsible for the moral treatment that Achaemenid kings accorded subject nations..."[48]

While Zoroastrianism was practiced by the king and many of the nobles by the time of Xerxes, the presence of other Aryan cults such as those of Mithra and Anahita remained strong.[49] By the time of Darius, the holy sayings of the *Avesta* were being taught in a formal school in the city-palace of Persepolis.[50] When Alexander invaded Persia in the 330s BC, the Zoroastrian magi had become a fully organized priesthood with set religious rituals.

There are a number of close parallels between Zoroastrian dualism and Jewish theology. The Zoroastrian concept of personal choice between the good and the bad has its parallels in the Jewish *yetzer tov* (good impulse) and *yetzer hara* (bad impulse).[51] The notion of *arta* (truth) versus *druj* (lie) is seen in the Hebrew Essene Manual of Discipline (Dead Sea Scrolls). The Zoroastrian pantheon of *yazata* (angels) versus *daeva* (demons) is found in the angels and demons of Judeo-Christianity. Of particular interest are the Zoroastrian concepts of the Apocalypse, resurrection, and Final Judgment. The Old Iranian term for Paradise,

The winged symbol of Ahura Mazda with the prophet Zoroaster in the center as a wall relief in the palace of Persepolis. (Topfoto/HIP)

Paridaeza, is also reflected in Judeo-Christian tradition as well as the existence of heaven and hell. Finally the Zoroastrian notion of the *Saoshyant* has its equivalent in the Jewish *Messiah*. As noted previously, Cyrus was viewed as savior of the Jews in the Book of Ezra and the Book of Isaiah. These parallels have led to intense academic debate as to the question of origins and influence. There are two schools of thought, one that dismisses these parallels as unrelated coincidences and another proposing a Zoroastrian influence on the development of Judaism, notably after Cyrus' conquests of Babylon.

Cyrus and the first World Empire

By the time of Darius the Great, the Persian Empire was present on three continents: Africa, Europe, and Asia. This was the first such empire in history. Zoroastrian principles notwithstanding, pragmatism played a major role in the ruling of such a vast and diverse empire. The Achaemenids must have been aware of the brutal and ultimately self-defeating policies that the Assyrians inflicted upon conquered peoples, a policy which ultimately united their enemies against them. Cyrus realized that he would never be able to maintain the Empire by relying on brute military force. Cyrus' successors, however, moved away from Cyrus' philosophy of rule, and were soon faced with revolts that had to be forcefully suppressed in later years.

Eire-An, or Persia, was much more than just an "Aryan" empire. The Aryan migrants had already assimilated many of the pre-Aryan peoples of Iran, such as the Elamites and the Mannaeans. The Iranian mainstream welcomed the Semitic-speaking aristocracies of once-mighty Assyria and Babylon. Perhaps most significant was the Empire's acknowledgment of the multitude of languages spoken by its inhabitants. Imperial declarations were often written in several languages, including Elamite, Aramaic, Babylonian, and Old Persian. While

Assyria may have fallen, her linguistic legacy was very much to survive in the Iranian world. Aramaic, not Old Persian, was the imperial and commercial language of the Achaemenid Empire. The legacy of Cyrus has lasted to this day, where modern Iran remains a multi-ethnic state including Iranian speakers (Kurds, Persians, Baluchis, Gilanis, etc.), Turkish speakers (Azerbaijanis, Qashqai, Turkmen, etc.), and Arabs in Khuzistan.

Cyrus' tragic end: Queen Tomyris and the Massagetae

During his early conquests, Cyrus had not extended the former Median realms of eastern and northeast Iran. After the Lydian and Babylonian campaigns in the west, Cyrus was intent on a major showdown in the region, especially against the Saka and Bactrians.[52] To the southeast, the Pamirs and the Hindukush had remained outside of Cyrus' conquests, but possible plans for an invasion of these regions cannot be ruled out. Cyrus did establish a base named *Kurtakh* (Cyropolis) on the Jaxartes River, which survived up until the Islamic conquests.

Cyrus focused his attention on the Massagetae in what is now Turkistan, Central Asia. He first dispatched a message to Queen Tomyris, asking for her hand in marriage, hoping to acquire her kingdom without having to resort to an invasion. When Tomyris refused, Cyrus prepared a military expedition in 530 BC and built a bridge to cross the Jaxartes River into Massagetaean domains.[53] At this juncture, Tomyris reputedly wrote a letter to Cyrus asking him to refrain from invasion. The letter offered two choices to Cyrus should he still be intent on battle: either Tomyris would withdraw three days' distance from Cyrus' forces at the bridge or Tomyris would cross to Cyrus' side of the river provided Cyrus would withdraw three days' distance to the south.[54] The generals voted in favor of the second choice (allowing Tomyris to cross into Achaemenid territory). However Croesus, who was in the entourage, suggested the opposite, a suggestion that Cyrus accepted. Cyrus informed Tomyris of his wishes, who complied as promised. Achaemenid forces now crossed into Massagetaean territory. Before his departure, Cyrus sent his son and heir-apparent Kambujiya II back to Persia.

The tactics adopted after the river-crossing had, again, been suggested earlier by Croesus. After a day's march, Cyrus paused and selected the weakest elements of his army to set up a camp. These were provided with luxurious foods and goods to entice the resource-hungry Massagetae to attack. Cyrus then withdrew some distance with his main army from the camp. The Massagetae did indeed attack with one-third of their forces, annihilating the camp's weak force. After the slaughter, the Massagetae are said to have feasted on the rich banquet that had been laid visibly and enticingly in the camp. It was at this juncture that Cyrus struck unexpectedly with his main force, destroying the Massagetaean raiders and taking many prisoners, including Spargapises, Queen Tomyris' son. The queen immediately demanded that Cyrus release her son or face destruction.[55] Spargapises committed suicide in captivity,

Tomyris now marched with her entire force for the final showdown with Cyrus. The two armies stood opposite one another. Herodotus fails to give a specific breakdown of the forces of Tomyris, however he does describe their forces as "like the Scythians [Saka Paradraya] … some ride, some do not – for they use both infantry and cavalry."[56] In an overall sense, the armies probably bore a superficial resemblance to one another. The battle opened with a furious archery duel resulting in the exhaustion of missiles by both sides.[57] Presumably this action involved both foot archers and horse archers. The armies then moved toward each other and engaged in brutal hand-to-hand combat, characterized by the use of "spears and daggers [possibly akenakes short swords]." There may have also been a deliberate attempt by Tomyris to have her finest horse archers target Cyrus with archery "sniping" during the battle, though this cannot be substantiated.

The battle seemed to be in the balance until the "Massagetae got the upper hand ... the Persian army was destroyed ... and Cyrus himself was killed."[58] Herodotus fails to expostulate how the Massagetae "got the upper hand," however it is possible to speculate on the decisive role played by their cavalry. Tomyris may have deployed a novel form of horseman into this particular battle, namely the forerunner of the armored knights of Persia. These "knights" were completely protected by suits of scale armor, helmets, and were possibly armed with lances;[59] the Massagetae were at the forefront of this military technology at the time.[60] The Massagetaean cavalry were indeed wholly armored in that "they give their horses bronze breastplates."[61] The Massagetaean heavy cavalry may have broken through Cyrus' infantry, the latter having been tactically surprised and ill-equipped to counter such a strike. The loss of their outstandingly capable and charismatic commander must have had a profound demoralizing effect on the Achaemenids, who recovered Cyrus' body after the battle and laid it to rest in a specially built crypt in Pasargadae.

The short reign of Kambujiya II

Kambujiya II (Cambysis) (r. 530–522 BC), son of Cyrus II and Princess Cassandane,[62] ascended the throne after his father's death in Central Asia. He had been designated as successor by Cyrus before his death, as the Achaemenids did not follow the rule of primogeniture for succession. Kambujiya had been the regent of Babylon, and was a resident at Uruk until at least the autumn of 528 BC. Classical history has characterized Kambujiya as a ruler prone to insanity, intolerance, and military incompetence.[63] Modern historiography suggests that Herodotus obtained his information from biased sources and that Kambujiya was in fact a talented military leader and, like his father, respected conquered peoples and their customs.[64] Negative stories such as that of Kambujiya slaying the Apis Bull and mocking the Egyptians, may have been derived from those Egyptian priests alienated by Kambujiya's reforms of their oligarchy.

Despite the disaster that had occurred against the Massagetae, Kambujiya did not spend much time in Central Asia. It is possible that he at least attempted to stabilize the frontier on the northeast. However, by 525 BC, Kambujiya was intent on completing one of his father's unfulfilled ambitions: the conquest of Egypt. Egypt was the last of the major powers of the ancient Near East to have remained outside of the Achaemenid orbit. The army made thorough preparations for the upcoming Egyptian expedition, and recruited the services of non-Iranian contingents such as the Ionians and the Aeolians.[65] Naval support was provided by the Phoenician princes, who had submitted to Cyrus after his conquest of Babylon. A supply base was formed on the southern portion of the Palestine coast. Nevertheless, the campaign was fraught with great risk as the harsh Sinai desert was both meager in water supplies and home to the fierce Bedouin Arab raiders. Egypt also had a formidable fleet, which could land troops in the rear of any invading Achaemenid army.

Kambujiya was assisted by a certain deserter from the Egyptian army named Phanes, the commander of the Greek mercenaries in the Egyptian army. Phanes obtained the audience of Kambujiya where he provided indispensable intelligence on the internal situation of

The tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae. Cyrus' mighty legacy and benevolence is reflected in the Judeo-Christian religions as well as the world's first true code of human rights. (Topfoto/HIP)

Egypt and especially her military.[66] To solve the dilemma of crossing the Sinai, Phanes suggested that Kambujiya obtain safe passage by contacting the local Arab chiefs of Gaza and the Sinai. The Arabs not only acceded to Kambujiya's request, but also agreed to supply his army with water. These were stored in camel-skins as they crossed the harsh Sinai desert into Egypt.[67] Egypt's deteriorating military position was further compounded by "fifth columnists" within her navy. Uzahor-Resenet, the Egyptian admiral, ensured that the fleet would remain docked in its harbors throughout Kambujiya's invasion.

Kambujiya crossed the Sinai in 525 BC. Psammenitos, the son of recently deceased Pharaoh Amasis, decided to make his stand at Pelusium, at the mouth of the River Nile. Kambujiya arrived and the battle was joined; the ensuing battle of Pelusium resulted in the total defeat of the Egyptian army. Few tactical details of the battle are available except that "after a battle had been fought with great stubbornness … the Egyptians at length turned to flight."[68] Hand-to-hand fighting with short swords, spears, and javelins is likely, yet the Egyptians were well trained and equipped for close-quarter fighting, and they also had the services of excellent Greek mercenaries. Perhaps what tilted the balance against Egypt was the superior skill of Kambujiya's foot archers and horse archers. The latter may have been somewhat of a novelty to the Egyptians, although they must have seen similar contingents of these amongst the Assyrian cavalry a few generations before.

After the rout at Pelusium, the Egyptians retreated to Memphis, which also fell to the Achaemenids. Nevertheless, Egyptian resistance remained stubborn, obliging Kambujiya to remain there for an additional three years. The attack against Ammon (Siwa) failed due to a sandstorm, an account that had been disputed until recent times.[69] The strategic Kharga Oasis was taken, followed by Cyrene and Barca further west. The Libyans appear to have offered no resistance and offered their submission to Kambujiya.[70] The attempt to annex Carthage proved impossible as the Phoenician sailors in Kambujiya's service refused to battle against their ethnic cousins in North Africa. By this time, contingents from Cyprus began arriving to serve in the Achaemenid army. Herodotus describes Kambujiya's thrust into Nubia as a total disaster.[71] However, careful consultation of Persian sources contradicts this,[72] especially when taking into consideration the fact that by the time of Darius the Great, Nubia was already a part of the Empire. A more probable event was that Kambujiya invaded the Nubian territories and captured at least a portion of their territory,[73] but perhaps at a great cost in manpower due partly to low food supplies as Herodotus has suggested.

Kambujiya had achieved the task of organizing Egypt as a satrapy of the Empire. His conquest of Egypt finally brought the entire civilized world, except Greece, India, and China, under a single empire, the largest and most diverse empire ever seen in history. Kambujiya assumed the position of Pharaoh of the 27th Dynasty, and was careful to observe and respect religious and secular Egyptian rituals.[74] The local government administration was kept intact by Kambujiya.[75] Upon his return to Persia, Kambujiya suffered an accidental death by his own sword as he mounted his horse in haste, thus ending his seven-year reign in 522 BC.[76] At the time of his death, Kambujiya had just been informed of a serious rebellion by his brother Bardiya (Smerdis to the Greeks) in Susa. The chaos caused by Bardiya's rebellion, and the fact that Kambujiya had left no son or heir, meant that Persia was heading towards civil war.

Gold Achaemenid armlet with terminals in the shape of griffins from the Oxus Treasure. (Werner Forman Archive)

Chapter 3
Darius the Great

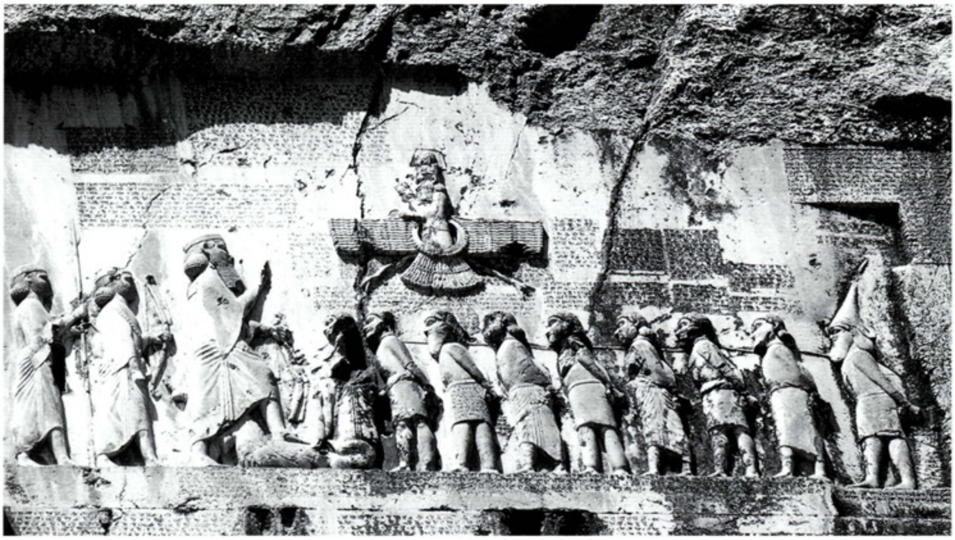
Darius (Old Persian: Darayavahush) (521–486 BC) was originally an *arshti-bara* (lit. spear-bearer) in Kambujiya's army in Egypt. It is likely that Darius held a position of high office, as he was a member of the Achaemenid royal family. Darius' family, however, was of the Ariaramnes branch of the Achaemenid line.[1]

Darius and six other conspirators[2] had plotted to seize the throne of Persia; however, there remained the question of who would be king. According to Herodotus, the seven conspirators agreed to meet at a designated spot with their horses at the break of dawn. He whose horse neighed first would become emperor of the Persian Empire. Darius' horse was reputedly the first to neigh, settling the issue. This "ascension" was, of course, a formality at best, as Darius now faced a truly daunting task. The Empire was being ripped asunder by royal pretenders, rebels, and breakaway movements that Darius had to confront before assuming the mantle of imperial government.

Darius defeats the rebels

The rebellion that the late Kambujiya had been informed of just before his death was allegedly being led by his brother Bardiya.[3] Bardiya had announced his claim to the throne on March 11, 522 BC to the Persians and the Medes who generally supported him.[4] Babylon officially accepted him on April 14, and by July 1 Bardiya was the recognized leader of the Empire. He was immensely popular especially after his suspension of state taxes and military service for three years. While such policies endeared Bardiya to the common population, he was not on entirely good terms with the magi or the Aryan feudal lords. The magi were apparently unhappy with Bardiya's policies with respect to the Aryan cults, while the ruling oligarchy may have seen the new taxation and war-levy policies as a direct challenge to their absolute authority, wealth and power.

There are serious questions as to the identity of the rebel Bardiya. One version of events states that the real Bardiya had already been killed before the "Bardiya" rebellion. Herodotus, who identifies the real Bardiya as "Smerdis," notes that he had been killed by Prexaspes, Kambujiya's chief advisor, and that the murder had been kept secret from the Empire's populace. If true, then who was the rebel claiming to be Bardiya? Darius is



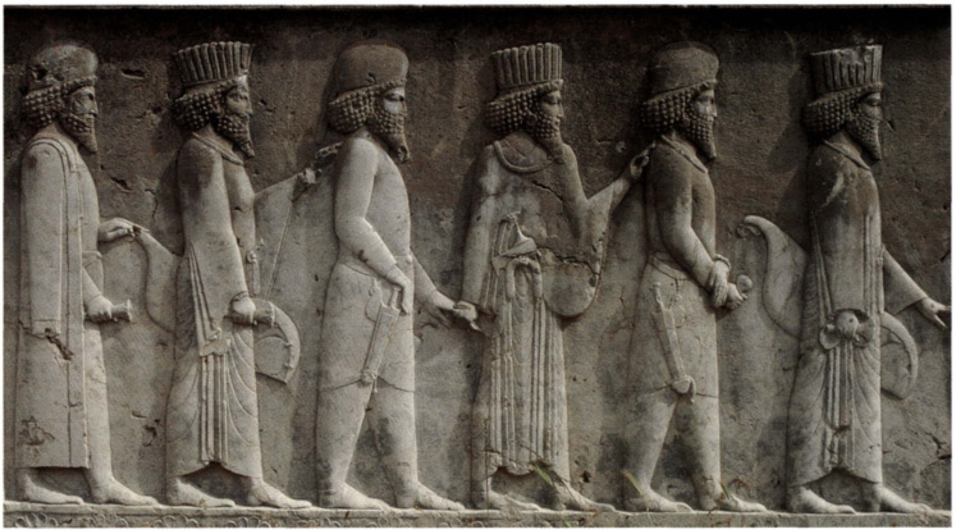
Darius the Great, standing with raised hand, triumphs over defeated rebels at Behistun, under the gaze of the winged Aryan god, Ahura Mazda. At far right stands Skunda, a rebel from the Saka Tigrakhauda. Below the carving are the inscriptions telling the story of the king's conquests in Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite. (© Livius.org)

certainly clear that the real Bardiya had already been slain by his brother Kambujiya before the Egyptian campaign in 525 BC. The rebel claiming his name was the imposter Gaumâta, a member of the magi, who managed to convince the Medes and Persians that he was the real Bardiya. Olmstead, however, disagrees with this version of events and suggests that Darius simply usurped the throne from the real Bardiya and falsified the truth to legitimize his own rule.[5] Whatever the actual truth, historians unanimously agree that Darius defeated and killed Bardiya/Gaumâta on September 29, 522 BC at the Sikayauvatish fortress in Media.

Darius' termination of the eight-month reign of Bardiya/Gaumâta was only the first step to power. The Bardiya/Gaumâta coup d'etat had acted as a catalyst for major rebellions throughout the Empire. Sources report on the appearance of a "king" in Elam as well as a "Nebuchadnezzar III" in Babylon by early October 522 BC. Darius' army was reportedly small, yet, it was a well trained and professional force composed of those Mede and Persian warriors who had served in the Egyptian campaigns.

Darius first moved into Elam in 522 BC where the weak rebellion quickly collapsed and order was temporarily restored. By December 522 BC, Darius and his forces crossed the Tigris into Babylon. After fighting two battles, the rebels of Babylon were subdued and Nebuchadnezzar III was executed. Meanwhile, yet more rebellions in Elam had to be suppressed by 519 BC,[6] and Assyria also remained to be subdued. However, the most serious challenges came from Darius' Iranian opponents. The Behistun inscription is clear that there were anti-Darius revolts in Persis and Media.[7] Persis had produced a certain Vahyazdata[8] making claims to the Achaemenid throne. The Medes, who were led by Fravartish, endeavored to reestablish the authority of the House of Cyaxares. Meanwhile, serious anti-Achaemenid rebellions had broken out in Armenia.

Eastern Iran also broke into open revolt. In Margiana a certain Frada led a rebel movement of his own. To defeat these threats, Darius dispatched his army to fight in Persis, Parthia, Margiana, and Armenia. The leaders of Darius' armies were from his closely trusted inner circle as evidenced by his father leading the battles in Parthia, and Vidarna, one of the original conspirators, leading the campaign in the Zagros Mountains. Darius



Noblemen from the northern stairs of the Apadana at Persepolis. The gorytos-style bowcase carried by two of the men resembles the North Iranian (Saka-Scythian) gorytos. The figure second from right wears Mede dress, the figure third from right wears a traditional costume from Persis, and the far-left figure wears a sleeved cloak, the kandys, which began to appear among Germanic warriors by the 3rd/4th centuries AD after their contacts with northern Iranian peoples in Eastern Europe. Several of the nobles carry the akenakes. (© Livius.org)

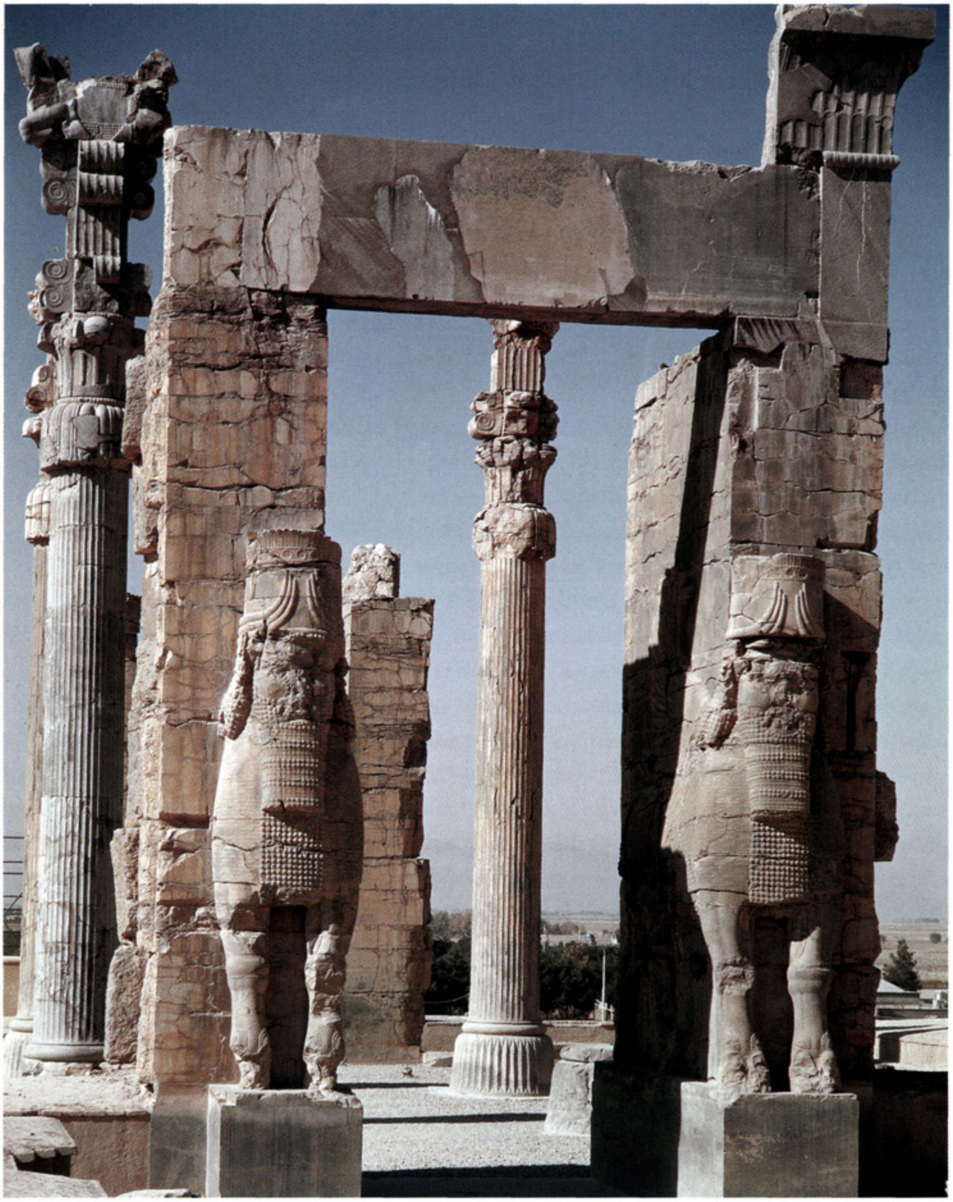
spearheaded the drive into northern Media where he crossed into Rhagae (Rayy), near modern-day Tehran. From there he wheeled northwest across Media Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan). It was probably sometime during this operation that the battle of Kundurush was fought. The securing of Media Atropatene allowed for the pro-Darius forces to swing northwards into Armenia in the Caucasus. The subjugation of Media, Persis, and Armenia allowed Darius to concentrate his entire might against the Parthian rebellion, finally bringing their stubborn resistance to an end. These battles were especially fierce, partly attested to in the Behistun inscription. The Parthian, Armenian, and Persian campaigns resulted in around 36,000 rebels being taken prisoner or killed, while in Media alone casualties were at least 20,000.

Interestingly, the satrapies of Asia Minor had remained neutral in the fighting, perhaps waiting to see who would seize the throne in Persia. The only act of retribution in Anatolia after the rebellions was the killing of a certain satrap of Lydia, Oriontes, who had taken advantage of the fighting in Persia to seize control of much of Achaemenid Asia Minor. A rebellion had broken out in Egypt, however this was most likely a local "Egyptian" revolt, which was suppressed by Darius by 518 BC.

By August 521 BC, Darius had completed the Herculean task of stabilizing the Empire, and was firmly in control. In the northeast, Bactria and Margiana had also been brought under Darius' authority, but the Saka Tigrakhauda and Massagetae had yet to be subdued. The Saka, who were outside the Empire at the time, had militarily intervened on the side of the rebels.[9] The potential danger of future attacks by these Sakas ensured that Darius would have to fight them in the near future.

Darius reestablishes the oligarchy

The inscriptions at Behistun in western Iran state that Darius "restored to the people" what Bardiya/Gaumâta had confiscated, namely land, pastures, slaves, and herds. The sanctuaries which Bardiya/Gaumâta had destroyed were also restored. The "people" that the Behistun inscription describes can only be the ruling oligarchy who had lost property. The rebellion was certainly as much about political leadership as it was between the prosperous few and the large "have-not" segment of the population. This would explain why Persian peasants as well as Medes joined Bardiya/Gaumâta. Darius' victories certainly benefited the social status and power of the Aryan feudal lords who were now more strongly bound to the Achaemenid royal house. There may have been a theological aspect to the rebellion suggesting that certain Aryan cults were siding with Bardiya/Gaumâta while others were with Darius and his supporters. There may be merit to suggestions that Bardiya/Gaumâta may have offended the followers of the cult of Mithra.[10] Bardiya/Gaumâta also destroyed the non-Aryan temples of the Elamites, a process which Darius reversed.[11]



The Gateway to All Nations in Persepolis. (© Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis)

Darius owed his success to his well-organized entourage, the disgruntled nobility,[12] and the loyalty of the Medo-Persian professional core of the army.[13] Another factor in Darius' success was the inability of his enemies to unite against him, resulting in all of them being isolated and crushed separately. Darius had demonstrated his genius at leadership and war: in the course of one year Darius had defeated numerous enemies, restored the authority of the Empire, and installed himself as emperor. He would also prove to be one of history's greatest statesmen.

Darius' reinstitution of *ancien régime* elements was to contribute to the later corruption and nepotism of the court, which in turn adversely affected imperial administration and military performance. This was accompanied by a steady rise in the fossilization and rigidity of Aryan codes of conduct, especially in the court. In contrast to Cyrus, the Achaemenid kings were to become increasingly aloof and distant from the people. Even the king's closest advisors were constrained in the way they could communicate with him. All of these factors resulted in many negative outcomes such as treachery and the pursuit of short-term interests. Another outcome was sycophancy as shown by court counselors providing inaccurate updates of military affairs to Xerxes during his invasions of Greece in 490 BC.

Darius' campaigns against the Saka Tigrakhauda

Darius' first campaign after the rebellions was directed towards the Central Asian frontier.[14] This theater was critical because of the Saka's intervention in the northeastern realms against Darius during the rebellion. Darius may also have wished to recover imperial prestige in Central Asia, especially after the death of Cyrus the Great at the hands of Queen Tomyris barely 20 years earlier.

By 519 BC, Darius deployed his army against the Saka Tigrakhauda in modern-day Turkistan, east of the Caspian Sea. While scant details exist of specific battlefield tactics, the battles were hard-fought. Faced with powerful resistance, Darius resorted to a particularly novel strategy. He boarded his army on ships based on the Caspian shores of northern Persia. These then sailed into the Caspian and swung east to land on the western shores of modern Turkistan. Darius now made a naval landing[15] to the rear of the Saka Tigrakhauda, taking their leader, Skunkha, entirely by surprise. The ensuing battle resulted in an overwhelming victory for Darius who added the defeated and bound image of Skunkha to that of recently defeated rebels at the Behistun inscriptions. This may indicate that the Achaemenids viewed Skunkha as a "rebel" to the throne, not surprising given the intervention of the Tigrakhauda earlier in support of the rebels against Darius.

Darius' successful expansion into Central Asia was of such significance that its implications have lasted to this day. First, formal commercial ties were now established between the Iranian plateau and Central Asia. This was the first time such commerce was regulated within the confines of a single empire. This vast region itself was soon economically integrated with Anatolia, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and India with the introduction of the *daric*. Second, Persia was to acquire the latest in Saka military developments and technology in horse archery and heavy armored cavalry.

"Heavy" cavalry first appeared among the vast steppe lands of Central Asia, Russia, and Ukraine, pre-dating the Achaemenids by at least a century.[16] It was specifically among the Massagetae Saka of Chorasmia, roughly present day Turkistan, where the true heavy cavalry experiments and lance combat began. The introduction of the north Iranian heavy cavalry concept into the Persian realm most likely took place after the conquest of the area by Darius. However, earlier influences cannot be ruled out. By the end of the 5th century BC northern and eastern Iranian cavalry technology equipment and armor had spread into the Achaemenid realm.[17] Eastern Iranian and Saka cavalry in Achaemenid service are described as wearing suits of scale armor, cuirasses, and helmets, and were heavily armed with close-quarter combat weapons.[18] These developments moved the Achaemenid military closer to the "armored fist" doctrine by the middle and latter parts of the dynasty.

Darius' expansion to India

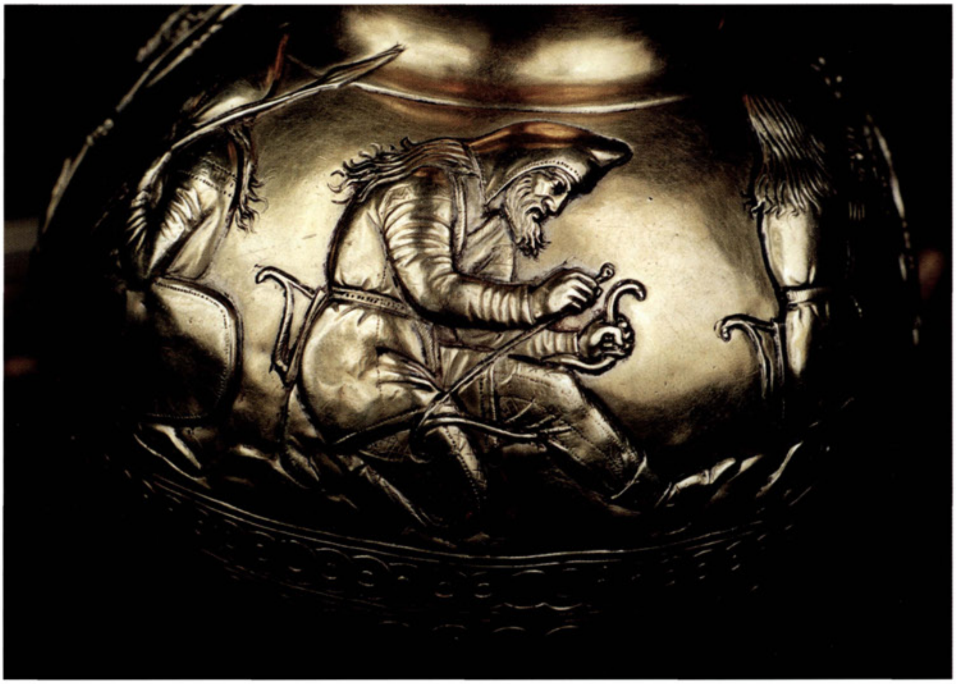
India is listed as one of the regions under Achaemenid control in Persian sources, but no information is provided about the campaigns or tactics of those conquests. Greco-Roman sources also fail at providing such information. Modern historiography is in general agreement that either the Median Empire or Cyrus the Great had incorporated regions known as Ghandara and Thatagush, which Herodotus cites as being inhabited by the Sattagydians. Nevertheless, Cyrus never decisively penetrated India, as corroborated by Arrian who stated that "no one else ever invaded India, not even Cyrus." Nearchos[19] even reports Cyrus losing the bulk of his army while trying to invade India through Baluchistan. With the ascension of Darius, however, the Empire would finally achieve successful conquests of India's northwest.

The Behistun inscriptions make clear that the region of Thatagush was also involved in rebellion against the Empire. No clear information is available as to how this region was retained in the Empire. Either the region was already under Darius' control before he initiated a new expansion into India between 520–513 BC, or Darius may simply have reconquered Thatagush as he thrust further southeast into India. In these operations, Darius' armies conquered the Sind region and made strong inroads all the way into modern-day Punjab. This is corroborated by Herodotus, who confirmed that "Darius conquered the Indians."[20] The period of the Indian campaign does overlap somewhat with Darius' Egyptian expedition, suggesting that while the latter had been subdued relatively quickly, Indian resistance against Darius was more prolonged.

The Sind and Punjab were of utmost economic and military significance to the Empire. Darius now had access to the Indus River, which resulted in a major economic boost to commerce and the royal treasury. The region was also very rich in gold and metals. The Indians supplied soldiers for the future wars with Greece – it is worth noting that the Iranians and Indians were probably still able to communicate without translators to a certain extent as their Aryan languages contained hundreds of cognates. By the early Sassanian era (AD 220s), however, Indian and Iranian languages had diverged very widely.

Darius' campaign against the Saka Paradraya

The Saka Paradraya of Europe, or Scythians, had yet to be subdued by Darius. Darius' announced pretext for the upcoming invasion of the Ukraine was to avenge the earlier destructive raids of the Scythians upon the Medes. The proposed invasion of the European Saka was greeted with circumspection in the Achaemenid royal house. Darius'



The gold vase from the Kul Oba tomb in the Ukraine. The panel clearly shows a Saka Paradraya (Scythian) stringing his bow. The Persians and the Medes were profoundly influenced by the archery technology of their northern Iranian cousins. (© Charles O'Rear/Corbis)

brother, Artabanus, noted that a military expedition into the Ukraine was not only fraught with great risk but, in the event of success, was of very little economic benefit to the Empire. Darius politely acknowledged his brother's counsel but decided in favor of the invasion, which occurred in 512 BC.[21] Darius' force was assembled at Susa, and soon marched to Chalcedon, most likely across the royal highway (Susa–Sardis). While Darius' assembly of troops in Asia Minor and the Bosphorus must have outnumbered the Scythians, Herodotus' report of 700,000 Achaemenid troops[22] has been seriously questioned.[23] The population base of the entire Empire would have allowed a maximum number of 70,000–150,000 men, still a large force by classical standards.

Transporting the invasion force from Asia Minor to Europe was a formidable task. They had to cross the Hellespont (Bosphorus) at Chalcedon and land in Thrace. From there, Darius was to march northeast, crossing the Danube and entering the eastern Rumanian–west Ukrainian region north of the Black Sea. The task of building the bridge was entrusted to Mandrocles, a Greek engineer from the island of Samos. Extrapolating from Greek sources, Iranian historians have calculated the Mandrocles Bridge as having spanned 72,833ft (22,200m). Darius crossed the Hellespont into Thrace, which submitted to the King.[24]

Darius' land force was accompanied by a naval force of Ionian Greeks who built 600 galleys before sailing up the northern coastline of the Black Sea, and north into the Danube, where they tied the ships together to create a gigantic pontoon bridge at a designated point and awaited Darius' arrival.[25] The king's army arrived in good order, and crossed over into Scythia. Even now no military resistance was in sight. Scythian appeals for assistance from neighboring tribes had as yet gone largely unanswered. The Ionians were ordered to destroy the fleet and join the Achaemenid invasion force. An Ionian general, however, advised the king to retain the fleet and allow the Ionians to remain in place to guard it as a precaution. Darius wisely heeded this counsel.[26] The Ionians were to remain at their posts for two months, and then permitted to sail for home unless they heard from the King.

The three major tribes of the Scythians were led by Scopasis, Taxasis, and Idanthyrsus; the latter was in overall command. The Scythians avoided a set-piece battle as they "were not able to repel the army of Darius alone by a pitched battle…"[27] A scorched-earth policy was implemented by Idanthyrsus in which all stores of food, shelter, and water-wells were destroyed[28] and thus denied to the advancing Achaemenid host. The Scythian deployment was two-fold: Idanthyrsus followed Darius in parallel while his ally Scopasis kept ahead of the host by a day's march, estimated by Cernenko as having been nearly 28 miles[29] (30–35km). Scopasis and Idanthyrsus were "guiding" Darius' army towards vast and virtually useless terrain. The aim was to draw Darius deeper and deeper into the Ukraine, exhaust his army and then launch hit and run cavalry raids.[30]

As Scopasis and Idanthyrsus retired eastwards, they grew stronger as more Scythians joined their banner. The Scythian and Achaemenid cavalry were similarly equipped with respect to equestrian gear and archery equipment,[31] however the former had the advantage with respect to horse archery.[32] Marching ever eastward in fruitless pursuit of an elusive enemy, Darius finally elected to retreat from the Scythian steppes. The wounded were abandoned as Darius and his remaining forces retreated back in haste towards the Danube. Fortunately for Darius, two missions from Scopasis had failed to persuade the Ionians to betray the Achaemenids, and they had maintained their position as promised.[33]

Historians reliant on Herodotus' narrative of Darius' invasion insist that the Darius expedition was a total failure.[34] However, while Darius had been compelled to withdraw, at least some of the Scythians bordering Thrace may have entered the orbit of the Empire. The discovery of an Achaemenid clay brick with inscriptions found at Gherla, Rumania, certainly raises the possibility of an Achaemenid presence deeper inside the Balkans.[35] Darius might have seen more success if he had recruited more Sakas and eastern Iranians from the eastern regions of his realms to counterbalance the martial abilities of the Scythians. Also, it may have been important that the large number of infantry in the Achaemenid force, combined with the lumbering baggage train, would have considerably impeded Darius' speed and mobility. The setback in Scythia was soon to be dwarfed by the coming battles in Greece.

Silver and gold bowl decorated with archers on the outside surface, perhaps members of the Anausha (Immortal) guards, 5th century BC. The pattern is reminiscent of the bas-relief of the Anausha guards at Persepolis. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

Darius and government

While Cyrus' advocacy of human rights was far ahead of his time, Darius' genius was in administration and commerce. The Empire was now reorganized into 20 large satrapies to facilitate administration and the collection of taxes.[36] Darius introduced a strong and efficient centralized government that was to endure until the fall of the Empire. It was during his reign that the Empire made the transition from an Aryan to an "oriental" empire. Darius now sought to codify the legal systems of all subject peoples. These reforms may explain why the Empire lasted as long as it did, especially after its glaring military failures in the upcoming Greco–Persian wars. Darius' legal reforms were praised by Plato,[37] who described the King as the "law-giver." As with Cyrus, Darius also made a positive impression in the Bible.[38] Darius' legacy of legal reform was to exert a latent but profound influence in the Greco-Roman world, especially in the context of the future Roman Empire. Many regions under Achaemenid rule were already sophisticated civilizations in their own right with their sets of laws (e.g. Babylon). Darius promoted the codifying of laws throughout the Empire, a process that benefited the legal processes of regions such as Egypt. Local laws, patents, and regulations from regions such as Ionia, Egypt, and Babylon were formally transcribed and distributed to officials in the legal systems of the satrapies.

There were two separate court systems. The first dealt with issues of family conflicts, inheritance issues, and property affairs. The second dealt with "imperial affairs" such as treason against the king, transgressions against the government, offenses against government officials, vandalism or theft against public properties, and tax evasion. The courts were administered by the *databdara* (lit. law bearer) who may have been a combination of the modern-day judge, law officer or constable. The notion of a "king's law" was an Achaemenid innovation,[39] one that was to be adopted by the later Roman Empire.[40]

The Achaemenid military settled Medo-Persian troops in recently conquered territories, including Asia Minor, Egypt, and Babylon. This settlement was encouraged by the granting of land parcels, not unlike the Roman system of military colonization in frontier regions. Garrisons often adopted the name of their commander, such as Bagadata, the son of Aspadasta, who settled with his garrison in Babylon.[41] This became the nucleus of an Iranian community, Bagadata (Pahlavi: Bogu-Dad), which survived up to the Arabian invasions, subsequently becoming Arabicized to "Al-Baghdad" by the onset of the Abbasid caliphate. Iranian garrison troops could also be of Saka or Chorasmian descent. There were also non-Iranian troops: Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Lydians, Phrygians, Indians, Egyptians, and Jews.

The world's first city-palace: Persepolis

The most enduring legacy of the Achaemenids is the city-palace of Parsa,[42] known by the Greeks and the West as Persepolis (Greek: City of the Persians). Modern Kurds, Azeris, Lurs, and Persians often refer to the site as "Takht-e-Jamshid" (lit. The Throne of Jamshid). A common misperception is that the sole palace of the Empire was Persepolis, when in fact a number of such sites have been reported by classical sources.[43] This was recently verified by an official announcement of the discovery of a large Achaemenid palace at Bolaghi dated to the time of Darius the Great.[44] The role of the grand palace at Susa as the winter capital, as well as other palaces in Ecbatana and Babylon, is well known to historians. There is general consensus that Darius moved the capital from Pasargadae to a site near modern Shiraz, which became Parsa or Persepolis. Darius began construction of a grand series of interconnected palaces at the site by 520 BC with full-scale work continuing under Xerxes. Persepolis' main structures of the *Apadana* (the courtyard), *Tachara* (summer palace), and *Hadish* (the seat, throne, royal residence) synthesized a vast array of artistic styles and motifs.[45] All construction work at Persepolis terminated after its destruction by Alexander the Great.[46]

It is a little-known fact that one of the most important functions of Persepolis was "the celebration of the Persian New Year festival which had acquired an imperial significance."[47] *Nowruz* (lit. New Year) signifies harmony, respect, diversity, unity, revival, and the exchange of gifts. The celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity is exemplified by the artwork of Persepolis. As noted by Dawson, "Persian official art avoided the Assyrian celebration of barbarity."[48] Assyrian depictions are, in fact, vivid in their depictions of conquered peoples such as Arabs, Jews, or Elamites being trampled, impaled, captured, and humiliated. No such depictions are to be found in Achaemenid arts or architecture, except in the Behistun reliefs, where Darius is seen facing the defeated and bound challengers to his throne and authority. Nevertheless this is no crude depiction of one people having brutally destroyed another; the contest is that between political adversaries rather than ethnic groupings. In the reliefs at Persepolis, subject peoples such as Africans, Arabs, Egyptians, and Lydians are depicted as bringing gifts to the king to symbolize the onset of the Nowruz.

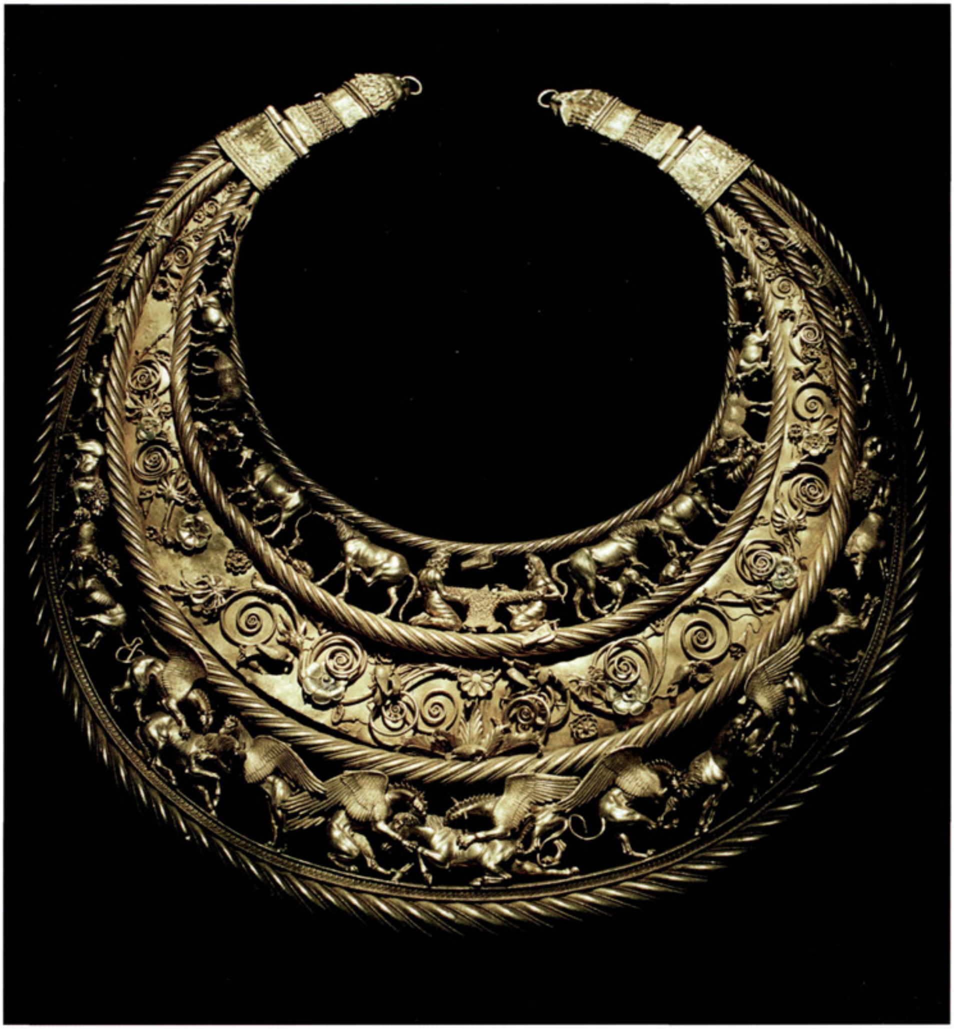
It was at Persepolis that the architectural and artistic styles of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, and Lydia arrived at an artistic and architectural synthesis. This resulted in the birth of a new school of arts known as the "Persepolis style." The most vivid example is the appearance of new types of columns, very different from those seen anywhere else in the ancient world.[49] While it is certainly true that Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian, and Assyrian tradesmen were employed in Persepolis' construction, these were contracted to technically implement the artistic motifs and architectural plans that had already been made by Medo-Persian engineers and architects.[50] An underlying aim of these architects may have been to express Zoroastrian themes such as racial harmony, as well as older Iranian animal motifs.

Persepolis: the silent legacy in arts, architecture, and culture

The role of Greek architecture and artistic traditions in the development of European cultures is beyond dispute. What is less known (or acknowledged), especially in European scholarship, is the symbiosis that existed between Greece and Persia. As noted by Professor Arthur Upham Pope, "The art of Iran is the permanent gift of the people of Iran to the history of the world."[51] Much of the Persepolis arts traveled to Anatolia, the Caucasus, Europe, Central Asia, and western Asia by way of the Empire's extensive commercial, cultural, and political links. Examples of unique Achaemenid artistic designs to reach Europe include roundels with winged lions, bowls, dishes, ladles, jars, jugs, and silver incense burners and griffin-like beast art being worked onto various metalworks including rhytons[52] – these would assume their final forms under the Sassanians hundreds of years later.[53]

It was in northwest Iran and in Luristan that the (European) Scythian culture and art were born.[54] The node of cultural and artistic transmission from the Iranian plateau to the Ukraine (through the Caucasus) was from the Ziwiyeh region, located south of Lake Urmia in northwest Iran.[55] By this time the Medes had been synthesizing their own artistic traditions with those of Mesopotamia and Urartu. The Iranian mythological motifs of beaked, large-eyed bird-gods, lions and predators tormenting prey, and a variety of "animal styles" in gold and silver are seen in shields, scabbards, swords, etc. at Ziwiyeh. The burial-mound patterns and arts of Ziwiyeh were taken from northern Iran into the Caucasus and the Ukraine by those Scythians who left Iran after the Medes established their rule in 625 BC.[56] The "refugee" Scythians arrived back into the Ukraine bringing with them the heritage of Median Iran.

This style became immortalized in the city-palace of Persepolis just as the Bosphoran arts of the Ukraine began to flourish. The Ukraine and the Iranian plateau were to remain culturally linked through the Caucasus and the Pontic regions until the destruction of the Bosphorus region (south Ukraine) by Turkic Magyar/Hun arrivals in the 4th century AD. Iranian and Greek artistic and architectural elements arrived at a unique synthesis in the Bosphorus region of the Ukraine. Greek colonies had already been established along the coastlines of the Black Sea. The Greek settlers mixed with the larger number of native Iranian speakers already resident in the area, resulting in a virtually unique style of arts and architecture. The "Sarmatian" style combined the fine, detailed, and polished Hellenic styles with the Persepolis motifs. The Medo/Persepolis–Hellenic synthesis was to spread westwards into modern-day Romania and from there to the Celts, who became profoundly influenced by Iranian motifs.[57] Vivid examples of these are the bird-god motifs and treasure found in the burial mounds of Sutton Hoo in England.[58]



Saka Paradraya (Scythian) golden pectoral. Note the battles between real and mythical beasts. These motifs were not only incorporated into the arts of Persepolis, but were to strongly resonate centuries later in the rock reliefs and metalworks of the Sassanian dynasty. (© Charles O'Rear/Corbis)

The culture and civilization of Europe, and indeed Rome and Western civilization, is much indebted to Classical Greece. The eastern Mediterranean has also had strong links with the "East," especially the Achaemenid Empire. The Mediterranean was linked to Anatolia, which came into contact with Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, and the Iranian plateau. Spatari has noted that the Persian Empire achieved an unprecedented level of cultural, artistic, architectural, and scientific-engineering synthesis between Central Asia, the Iranian plateau, Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, and Egypt. This cultural system, termed by Spatari as "Asittite," linked the Achaemenid Empire of Persia through the Aegean region to Greece, Egypt, and southern Italy, notably Calabria. The presence of Greek colonists in southern Italy has been well documented by Western historians, especially along the Calabrian coast. Less known is the presence of a Medo-Persian community in southern Italy dating back to 500–450 BC.[59] This has been explained as one of the consequences of the largely ignored Iranian plateau–Anatolia–Mediterranean axis that also allowed for the ingress of "eastern" artistic and architectural influences. Examples include the close parallels between the image of Darius the Great in the Treasury at Persepolis (see p.76) and the statue of the Goddess Persephone[60] (lit. she who speaks Persian) held in the Staatlische Museum in Berlin, or the striking similarity between the columns of Persepolis and a number of those at Cattedrale di Gerace in Calabria.[61] One dramatic example of Achaemenid or Asittite influences on mainstream Classical Greek arts and architecture is found at the Odeon of Pericles on the south slope of the Acropolis in Athens. Western researchers compared the dimensions of the Odeon (225 × 204ft/68.5 × 62.4m with 90 pillars) with the older Hall of the Hundred in Persepolis (225 × 225ft/68.5 × 68.5m with 100 pillars) and found them to be virtually identical. This similarity may be attributed to Xerxes' carrying a portable version of the Hall of the Hundred on his invasion of Greece.

Promotion of Babylonian astronomy

Darius was not only a highly competent imperial administrator and the promoter of commerce, but was also a keen promoter of learning, especially in Babylon. Babylon already had a 2,000-year tradition of mathematics and astronomy before the foundation of the Achaemenid Empire. Babylonian scholarship rivaled that of Egypt or Greece, and the calculations of Babylonian scholars in astronomy helped lay the foundations for more advanced mathematics. Darius the Great was well aware of Babylonian scholarly abilities and summoned their finest minds to his court to have them refine the calendar and calculate the Iranian New Year, itself a derivation of the more ancient Babylonian *Nisannu* festival. Babylonian scholars continued to appear in the royal courts long after Darius. One example is that of Kidinnu (Cidenas) during the reign of Artaxerxes II in 375 BC. Kidinnu's calculations were so exact that they show few discrepancies with modern clocks, telescopes, or even computers.

Darius the Great and the expansion of communications

The enormous size of Darius' empire now necessitated the introduction of a more advanced system of communications. This was one of the major reasons why the royal highway and postal service were introduced. The royal road also allowed for the smooth movement of manufactured goods and services between the Iranian plateau and Anatolia.

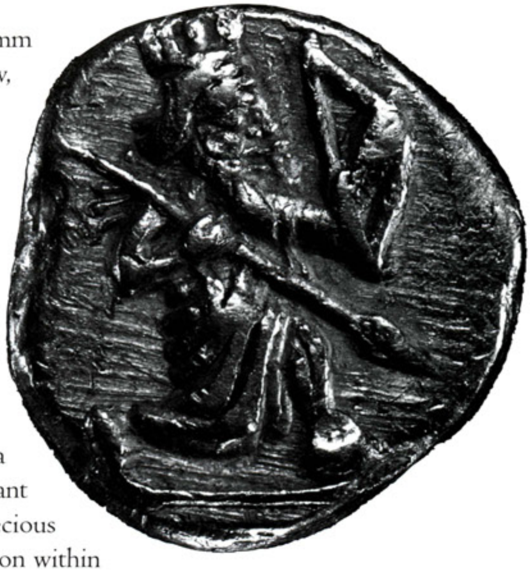
The royal highway stretched about 1,678 miles (2,700km) between Susa in southwest Persia and Sardis in western Anatolia.[62] The building of this road was meant to facilitate the commercial, cultural, and military links between the Aegean Sea and the Iranian plateau.[63] Herodotus rated the royal road as "Excellent."[64] By the end of Darius' reign (or perhaps sooner), the Empire had built inns at 4-parsang[65] (approx. 15-mile or 24km) intervals. These provided lodgings for dignitaries involved in trade, government, and military affairs as well as ordinary travelers. Each inn featured walled encampments to provide protection for horses and pack animals.

While the Susa–Sardis highway has attracted the attention of Western scholars for decades, there were other highways across the Empire. The eastern regions towards Central Asia and India were just as important to the Empire as the western satrapies. Hallock has found an inscription detailing a princess who traveled from Susa to Kandahara, a distance of well over 600 miles (1000km).[66] The Achaemenids also built a number of bridges across rivers to facilitate travel and commerce.[67] The imperial highway system was also instrumental in allowing the Empire to deploy troops rapidly to crucial theaters. During wartime, the Achaemenid army would (in addition to its baggage train) be logistically supported by an organized system of storehouses that were placed along major highways.[68]

It is debatable how much the royal highway influenced Western civilization, especially after the arrival of Alexander. The Greeks certainly knew of the royal highway and its efficiency, and some Iranian scholars have suggested that the Roman highway system may have been inspired in part by the Achaemenids. However, there is good evidence that the Roman highway system was part of an independent European development, as shown by the preceding Celtic road networks. Perhaps the Romans knew of the Persian rest station system, a possibility that awaits further investigation.

Perhaps one of the greatest Achaemenid achievements was the creation of an empire-wide "Pony Express" for delivering mail. The imperial administration devoted considerable resources towards the training of riders, and horses were bred specially for speed. The Empire provided stations at the interval of a day's ride on horseback: the mail would be carried between stations by a fresh rider and mount each day. This system allowed for an amazing improvement in the transmission of messages. Previously letters sent between Susa and Sardis would have taken three months for delivery: the new Iranian "Pony Express" could deliver that same letter in seven days. There was also a system of fire-towers that relayed their own version of morse code from station to station.[69] The efficiency of this system is testified by the longevity of its use; this survived in Iran until the 19th century when the advent of the telegraph finally made it obsolete. Mazzarino[70] has noted that the Greeks adopted crucial elements of Persian techniques of communication into their civilization, which were then passed on to the Romans.

After his conquest of Persia, Alexander the Great was to adopt the Persian postal system, resulting in its introduction to the Hellenic and later Roman worlds. The Roman Empire implemented an imperial mailing service, which was very much modeled on that of the Achaemenids of old. The Romans introduced the postal system into Europe, a system that has survived into the electronic age. The efficiency of the Persian postal system is perhaps best characterized by Herodotus who noted that: "There is nothing in the world that travels faster than these Persian couriers … nothing stops these couriers fromm covering their allotted stages in the quickest … time … neither snow, rain, wind, nor darkness…"[71]



The gold daric introduced by Darius the Great allowed for a single currency to regulate trade and commerce throughout the vast empire. Discovery of the daric in Eastern Europe is an indication that the European Saka (Scythians) were mediating trade between Persia and Europe. (Topfoto)

Darius' universal currency: the daric

Perhaps one of the most enduring aspects of Darius' reign was his introduction of a universal currency known as the *daric*. Herodotus describes Darius as a king who endeavored at "making a gain in everything…"[72] For the first time in history, a standardized currency had been established which allowed for the standardization of trade across continents, languages, peoples, and customs.

Cyrus' acquisition of Babylon, Assyria, and Lydia resulted in a rapid and vast increase in the Empire's treasury.[73] There was a concomitant increase in manpower, livestock, lumber, metals, and other precious commodities. Cyrus' conquest of Lydia also introduced a key innovation within the Empire: coinage currency. It was Croesus of Lydia who first introduced the concept of gold and silver coins as state currency.[74] Mallowan has suggested that it was Cyrus who first introduced the Lydian invention into the Empire.[75] This may be true, yet, it was Darius who first officially applied the coinage system as a standard transnational currency.[76]

The daric gold coin could be exchanged for goods and services throughout the Empire. It is perhaps no exaggeration to state that the daric become the most important currency of its time, and became recognized beyond the Empire's borders as far as Celtic Central Europe. Only the king issued the gold daric, while satraps and important generals issued the silver daric. The latter usually did so to recruit Greek mercenary troops in western Anatolia.

The daric was a major boost to international business traffic. Networks for this had already been established by the royal highway, postal system, and Phoenician-based commercial shipping. The rise in international commerce led to a major increase in the private sector, especially in manufactured goods. Textiles, carpets, dried fruits, garments, metalworks, tools, and a variety of other items now began to flow between Asia, the Near East, Africa, and Europe.[77] These in turn led to the rise of the world's first "free trade" and "common market" economy. By reducing goods and services into a "common money denominator,"[78] Darius not only revolutionized commerce in the civilized world, but also helped lay an important basis for modern-day currencies.

Prior to the introduction of the daric, the Empire's taxation system had collected property and provincial taxes. With the onset of the daric new customs or "duties" taxes were also introduced. There were concomitant taxes for land, cattle, marketplaces, etc. These led to a huge increase in government revenues. The combined taxes were fed back into the economy, which helped maintain and improve existing infrastructures. Increased tax revenues allowed for the funding of irrigation projects in formerly dry areas, thereby promoting public agriculture. Land was also formally registered, measured, and taxed accordingly.

The complex tax system soon necessitated the organization of formal state banking. The Babylonians had had such a system in place, and Darius now applied this concept to manage the fiscal affairs of the entire Empire. A famous banking firm was that of Murashu and Sons, based in Nippur. This firm and many others like it reveal that Darius' banks were now

Plaques from the Oxus Treasure. Central gold plaque depicts a man carrying an akenakes and dressed in Mede costume. (Ann Ronan Picture Library/HIP/Topfoto)

engaged in the very modern practices of providing loans and credits to clients. There was also a standard system of weights and measures introduced throughout the Empire.[79]

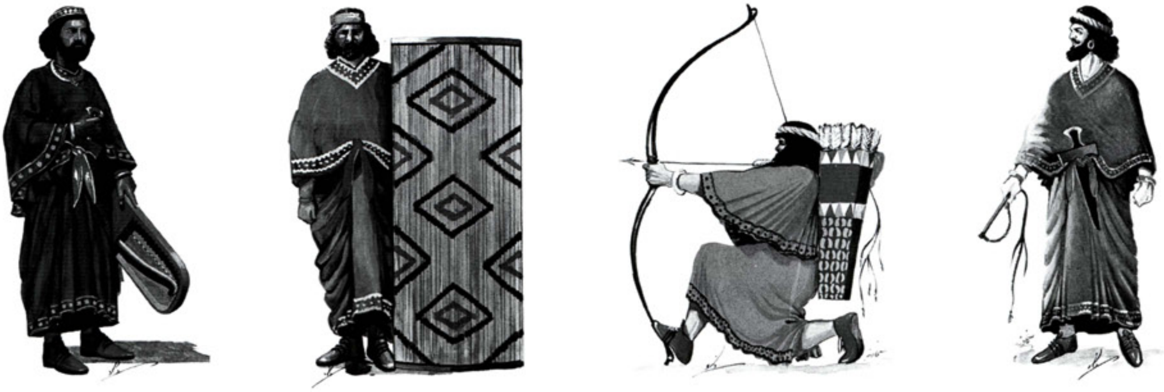
The communication and travel networks established under Darius had many positive cultural consequences, including the promotion and meeting of Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian scholarship. One scholar to take advantage of the links provided by the Achaemenid Empire was Pythagoras (582–500 BC) of Samos in Ionia, which was under Achaemenid rule. Pythagoras, one of the founders of the discipline of geometry, traveled to Egypt, where Plato (4th century BC) and Thales also engaged in the study of Egyptian sciences. Plato's *Alcibiades II* certainly reveals a high degree of familiarity with the customs, religion, and education of the Persians. Given this in-depth understanding of Persian thought, Plato's later dualistic leaning may be at least partly influenced by Zoroastrianism. Thales (624–546 BC) was another native of Ionia, and studied in ancient Egypt and Babylon. Another famous resident of Achaemenid-ruled Ionia was Democritus of Abdera (460–370 BC), well known for his hypothesis of atoms. He was a student of Babylonian science and introduced much of what he learned from his Babylonian tutors to Greece. While Babylonian astronomy exerted its influence on Greece (and ultimately Europe), the study of this was banned as blasphemy in 5th-century BC Athens. This is vividly seen with Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (Ionia), who was exiled from Athens due to his hypotheses about the sun.

Darius and maritime trade

The Persian Gulf is of immense importance due to its proximity to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Babylon's last ruler, Nabonidus, had attempted to control the trade routes of the Persian Gulf[80] before his overthrow by Cyrus the Great. By the time of Darius the Achaemenids were in full control of the maritime commerce of the Persian Gulf, which linked Oman, the Arabian Sea, India, and the southern Iranian coastline into one large maritime trading zone. The full organization of these trade routes, however, would have to await the arrival of the Sassanians centuries later. A number of records from Susa report on the use of transport ships in the ferrying of construction materials from the Mesopotamian rivers into the Persian Gulf. This indicates that the full linkage of the Mesopotamian–Iranian plateau regions with the Persian Gulf was fully underway by the reign of Darius.

Herodotus reports Darius commissioning Scylax of Caryanda (modern southwest Turkey) to undertake a maritime reconnaissance mission prior to the Indian campaign. Scylax is said to have sailed along the Indus and from there to Suez in Egypt, making the first maritime link between India and the Red Sea. One of Darius' objectives had been to facilitate maritime and naval communications between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. This project had already been unsuccessfully attempted by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho (610–595 BC). Scylax discovered a stretch of land from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula that acted as barrier between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Darius' engineers were apparently successful in building a canal, now the Suez Canal, connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean by 498 BC.[81] The canal was wide enough for two ships to pass. Commemorations for the inauguration of the canal record two or more dozen ships using the canal. Further plans to widen the canal were abandoned due to concerns of flooding into the Egyptian plains.[82]

Feline god on the columns of the Apadana at Persepolis, similar to the later senmurv of the Sassanian era. (© Paul Almasy/Corbis)



Achaemenid infantry as they would have appeared at the time of the invasions of Greece. From left, Persian officer carrying a gorytos bow-case, infantryman carrying a wicker shield, foot archer drawing his bow, soldier carrying whip. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

The Achaemenid navy and naval engineering

Since its foundation by Cyrus, the Achaemenid Empire had been very much a "land" empire, but this had changed by the time of Darius. By the 5th century BC, the Achaemenids sat across the Black Sea, the Aegean, the coastal arc of Palestine–Phoenicia–Egypt on the Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf. Darius strived to make the Empire as formidable on sea as it was on land. His major challenge was that the Empire had no military fleet of its own. While combat vessels were an ancient Mediterranean tradition, no true "imperial navy" had yet appeared in the ancient world. One of Darius' spectacular achievements was his ability to successfully inaugurate and deploy the world's first regular imperial navy. Nevertheless, the mariners and original ships of that navy were not Iranian. The personnel for Darius' navy were Mediterranean peoples such as the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Cypriots, and Greeks from the Aegean area. It was the Phoenicians (mainly from Sidon) who became the primary mariners of the Achaemenid Navy.[83] They set the basis of Iranian naval engineering and helped expand the Empire's maritime trade.

The ships of the Achaemenid navy were built in Phoenician shipyards by Phoenician engineers. The first naval ships of the Achaemenids measured approximately 40m in length and 6m in width; these were able to transport a maximum of 300 troops.[84] State arsenals, however, soon emerged outside of Phoenician yards and these were dedicated to the construction of new vessels, repairs, and applying improvements to existing ships. An example of such a vessel is cited in Memphis by the 5th century BC.[85] Similar arsenals began to appear in the Persian Gulf area, laying the basis of a powerful Persian maritime tradition that remained in the region until the arrival of the British East India Company and the Royal Navy by the mid-19th century AD.

Smaller vessels laden with a maximum of 100–200 troops patrolled the Shatt al-Arab waterway and the Persian Gulf, the Nile in Egypt, the Sind waterway in India, as well as the Euphrates. Achaemenid ships were armed with a metallic blade on the front, meant to slice into the hulls of enemy ships, and hooks that were used to catch and halt enemy ships. Two mangonels launched projectiles such as heavy stones or flammable substances against enemy ships or coastal defenses. The Achaemenid navy also began to use boats to connect the banks of rivers by joining vessels to one another.[86] One such example is reported by Xenophon,[87] who observed a military bridge being erected across the Tigris by fastening 37 boats together. Another example is a smaller bridge of seven boats that was built across the Maeander River. Perhaps the most ingenious source of river-ferrying was the use of inflated animal skins, floated as rafts.[88] In Iraq these are known as *kalaks* and may be attributed to Assyrian marine commandos.

The high command constructed three major naval bases. The first naval headquarters were based along the Shatt al-Arab waterway that runs along Iran's Khuzistan province and into the Persian Gulf. Achaemenid ships patrolled the waterway and streamed into the Persian Gulf to patrol the settlements along the Empire's southern coastline, as well as islands such as Bahrain. Settlements soon appeared along areas such as Yemen and Oman, and sea traffic went beyond the Persian Gulf, with India as the primary destination. The second headquarters protected the eastern and southern Mediterranean, notably Palestine-Judea, Phoenicia, and Egypt. Commercial shipping had been active in this region, notably between Egypt, the Levant coast, the Aegean and southern Italy, especially Calabria and Sicily. The role of the Achaemenid navy was probably to protect the already established lucrative trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean, and the coastal cities under imperial rule. The third major Achaemenid base was to profoundly influence the course of Greek, and by implication, Western history, especially in its relations with Persia. This was the primary Achaemenid naval base, located in Cilicia, and kept in constant battle-readiness with the aim of projecting power into the Mediterranean.[89] This was a direct challenge to Hellenic maritime and commercial supremacy in the Aegean Sea.

Darius' invasion of Greece: defeat at Marathon

Even as Darius was expanding his domains towards India, Achaemenid control was being exercised on the Ionian Greeks in modern-day western Turkey as early as 517 BC. It was these same Ionians who had provided Darius with naval transportation for the failed campaign against the Scythians in 512 BC. The peace that followed Darius' campaigns into Thrace and Scythia was soon to shatter.

The predominant historical view found among Western historians is that the Ionian revolt and the Greco-Persian wars were an epic contest between democracy (as represented by Greece) and "Persian tyranny." Frye cautions that "the interpretation of … Greeks defending liberty [is] an example of imposing modern concepts on the past [and] distorting our understanding…"[90] While the Ionian desire for independence from Achaemenid rule is a major factor that led to war, the element of economic rivalry was an equally important factor.

Western historiography has begun to acknowledge the clash between the maritime ambitions of the Achaemenids and the Greeks. Greek colonies were already established in Calabria and further west along the modern southern French coastline, notably the cities of Nicaea (modern Nice) and Massilia (Marseilles). Greek shipping had allowed for the establishment of a Greek colony in the Caucasus, one that survives to this day in the modern Republic of Georgia. It is generally agreed that by 513 BC, Darius had sent a naval squadron with the Greek guide and doctor Democedes on a reconnaissance mission to chart the coasts of Greece and southern Italy, and that there was a small Medo-Persian settlement in southern Italy. The Greeks were concerned with growing Achaemenid power in the Aegean, viewing Achaemenid naval deployment there as a direct challenge, and a threat as the Achaemenids

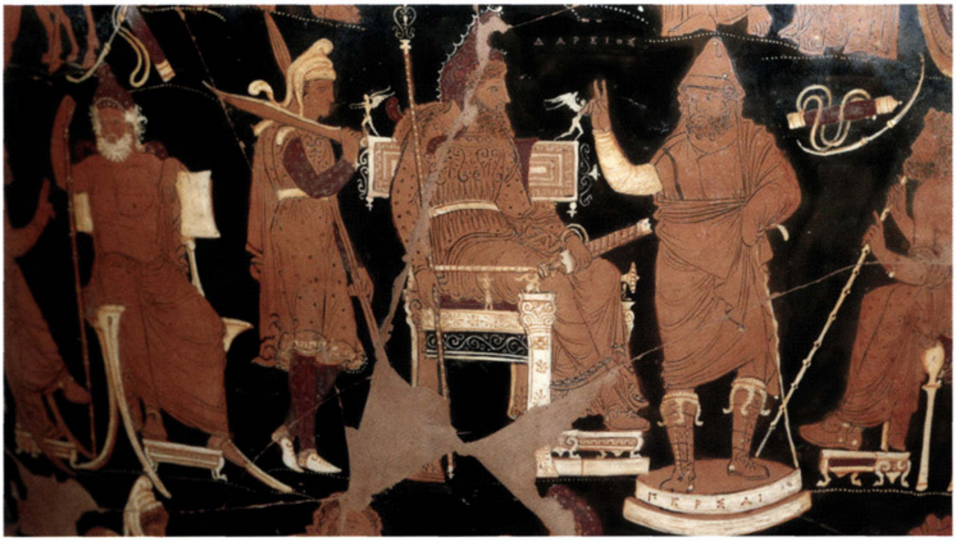
would soon be able to regulate and control the ingress of grain from the Ukraine into the Aegean and Mediterranean.[91] The Achaemenids were already in control of Egypt and its trade links along the south Mediterranean.[92] If the Achaemenids were to shatter Hellenic predominance in the Aegean, no rivals would remain to block the Empire's maritime, political, and military expansion further into the Mediterranean. Persia's coming wars with the Greeks, however, were to have consequences that have lasted to this day: it was in the Aegean theater where the so-called "east" versus "west" delineation was first formulated.

OPPOSITE Darius engaged in mortal combat against a malevolent entity. Carving on the inside of the doorway into the Tachara at Persepolis. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge)

The Ionians of western Anatolia along the Aegean Sea were ethnic Greeks, close kin to the Athenians. The democratic-minded Ionians, who drew their political inspiration and culture from their cousins in Greece, revolted against the Empire in 499 BC. The Ionians were soon joined by the Carians and Cypriot Greeks, resulting in the complete ejection of Achaemenid authority from the region and the burning of Sardis in 498 BC. The Athenians from European Greece began supporting the Ionians with assistance by 497 BC; the Eretrians also provided support for the rebellion. Darius resorted to a two-pronged strategy to defeat the rebellion. First he attempted to divide and conquer by negotiating with some of the Ionian city-states. The second, parallel, strategy was to prepare a powerful counterstrike to recapture lost territory. The Achaemenid offensive, however, failed to destroy the revolt. By 495 BC, the Ionians were completely independent of the Achaemenid Empire.

Despite the previous year's failures, the Empire reorganized its forces and succeeded in defeating the Ionian Greeks by 494 BC. Achaemenid forces concentrated on defeating the Ionian navy at Miletus. The army then reduced each of the Ionian city-states separately. Darius, however, seems to have gone some way to appease the Ionians. Mardonius, the king's son-in-law, was sent to the region as high commissioner, where he displaced the local despots in favor of democratic rule. Thrace and Macedonia had to be reconquered as these had also slipped outside Achaemenid control during the five-year Ionian revolt. Mardonius successfully returned these to Achaemenid rule.[93]

Darius now looked westwards towards mainland Greece, which had supported the Ionian revolt. From the Empire's perspective, the actions of the Greeks during the Ionian



This late 4th-century Apulian vase shows Darius the Great, seated on a throne, debating how to confront the Greek warriors at Marathon. His counselor is seen standing on a round dais next to him. (akg-images/Nimitallah) revolt could not go unpunished. Darius demanded total submission from all the Greek city-states. While many acceded to Darius' request, Athens and Sparta refused to comply. The stage was set for the first invasion of Europe from Asia.

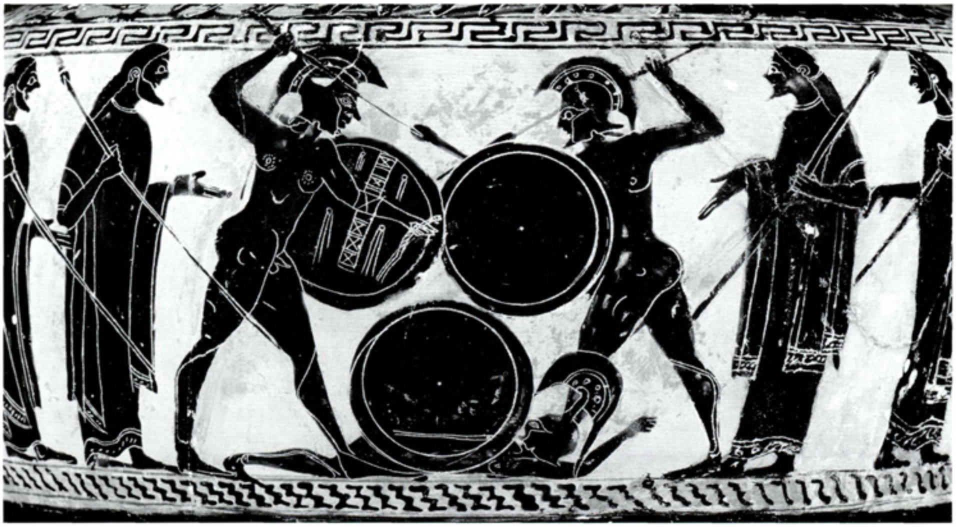
Datis, the Mede commander of the naval and land forces, led the attack against the European Greeks, namely the Athenians and the Spartans. The invasion force was transported by the navy, accompanied with specialized horse-transport ships. These set sail from the southern coast of Anatolia. Datis appears to have resorted to guile to confuse the Greeks as to his real intentions. He first swung north along the Aegean coast to lead the Greeks to believe that the invasion fleet would simply continue up the northern Aegean region before striking Greece. In practice Datis had swung westwards into the Aegean, an action that caught the Greeks by surprise. The islands of Euboea (and its city Eretria) and Naxos were rapidly occupied. More alarming for the Greeks was Datis' landing on the Bay of Marathon with 20,000 infantry, archers, and cavalry. The force faced the great marsh to the west of Mount Drakonera, and was located just northeast of Athens.

The battle of Marathon

Datis' force marched westwards from the beachhead to face the Athenian force. The Spartan allies were absent from the battle, as they were engaged in religious rituals; when they finally arrived, the battle had been concluded, although all the 1,000 hoplites of Plataea were available to support the Athenians. The Athenian hoplites had cunningly positioned themselves on the elevated ground between mounts Agrieliki and Stavrokoraki. This effectively wrested the initiative of a first strike away from Darius' cavalry. When the Achaemenid force approached the Athenians, they halted, initiating a stalemate in which both sides cautiously observed each other without resorting to action for at least nine days. The initiative was eventually seized by the Athenians on August 12 or September 9, 490 BC.

The Athenian hoplite formations were organized well out of the range of foot or horse archery. They were trained to move literally as one battle unit, with each man expected to steadfastly adhere to his position and function within the phalanx. The phalanxes themselves were eight men deep, allowing for losses in the front lines to be rapidly replaced. From a distance of roughly 1,600 yards (1,450m), the Athenians charged downhill, straight toward the Achaemenids. The hoplites had extended their lines by thinning out their center. This was to deny Achaemenid cavalry any chance of outflanking the Athenian front. The Achaemenids were actually caught totally by surprise, as their cavalry was being watered and fed when the attack came.

From the Achaemenid perspective, the Athenian charge appeared foolhardy and suicidal as they had proceeded without archery preparation or cavalry support. Herodotus has commented on the surprise of the Achaemenids who observed the Greeks as being "bereft of their senses, and bent upon their own destruction."[94] Discounting the failure of the Scythian campaign, the Achaemenids still believed in the supremacy of their arms. Little did Darius and his commanders imagine how that sense of supremacy would soon be shattered as the Greek hoplites came closer and closer. The Achaemenids calmly waited for the Athenians to come into archery range and then opened fire. Wave after wave of missiles now rained down upon the Athenians. But this time Achaemenid archery proved ineffective. The Greeks' interlocking shields protected them from the deadly salvos of Persian archery. Each hoplite was also well protected by bronze helmets, greaves, and tough body armor which



Greek vase showing warriors dueling, with a dying hoplite on the ground. When the Achaemenids landed in Marathon, they faced warriors who were trained in a centuries old martial arts tradition. Greek vases and artistic portrayals show Greek warriors training in surprisingly "modern" styles, punching, kicking, and wrestling, under instructors who were veterans of previous wars. Athletic training in ancient Greece was an integral facet of the Hellenic psyche that emphasized physical and mental fitness suitable to the home of the Olympics. Although archery was held in the highest cultural and military esteem in the Iranian world, the almost exact opposite was found in Classical Greece, where the bow was viewed as a second-class weapon, a fact evident in Classical Greek literature. (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

negated the worst effects of Medo-Persian archery. To the shock and surprise of the Achaemenids, the undaunted hoplites reached their lines virtually intact and began to engage in hand-to-hand combat. This was the type of warfare that the Greeks excelled at, and which the Achaemenids were ill-equipped to resist, especially with respect to armored protection, martial training, and hand-to-hand weapons. The hoplites began to decimate the Achaemenid archers and infantry.

By this time, the Achaemenid cavalry had returned to the main force, immediately pushing forward to rescue their hard-pressed comrades. Despite heavy losses, the Persian and Saka cavalry did manage to push back the Athenian center.[95] That success, however, was a temporary battlefield mirage, as the hoplites had maneuvered their adversaries into a deadly trap. They now forced themselves against the Achaemenid left and right flanks. The Achaemenid cavalry did their best to prevent the flanks from collapsing, but to no avail. As the flanks collapsed, the Achaemenids found themselves surrounded, with the Greeks losing no time in destroying them. The survivors of the doomed force retreated south toward the shore where they were evacuated by a rescue fleet. The Greeks pursued and killed huge numbers of the fleeing forces before they reached their ships.[96] Other retreating troops drowned in the nearby swamp. The total number of Greek losses at Marathon is reported as 192, against 6,400 Achaemenids.[97]

Marathon proved to be the first in a series of military and political shocks that finally toppled the Empire. Marathon brutally demonstrated the serious weaknesses of the Achaemenid battle order, a lesson that the Empire failed to appreciate and rectify, to its ultimate peril. Nevertheless, the Greeks were as yet unable to eject the Achaemenids from the Aegean or Thrace. While Darius had every intention of launching another invasion against Greece, a serious rebellion in Egypt prevented this from materializing. Darius died just four years after Marathon, in 486 BC, with the mantle of imperial kingship passing to his son, Xerxes.

Chapter 4

Xerxes and Limits of Empire

Xerxes' ascension to power after Darius' death in November 486 BC went without incident. Interestingly, Queen Atoosa, Xerxes' mother, had convinced Darius to name Xerxes as his heir despite the fact that he was not the King's eldest son. Once in power, Xerxes (r. 486–465 BC) was confronted with dangerous rebellions in Egypt and Babylon.

Four months before his death, the ailing Darius had been informed of a serious revolt in Egypt. He took no serious action against this, and Egypt practically broke away from the Empire. When Xerxes ascended the throne, Egypt was independent. Xerxes took his time in organizing a well-prepared and thorough campaign to thrust into Egypt and reconquer it. This occurred in 484 BC, after which Xerxes imposed harsh occupational terms on the populace[1] and reversed the enlightened policies of his predecessors, including the termination of subsidies for the building of temples and even the outright confiscation of lands belonging to existing temples.[2]

Just as the Egyptian campaign was concluded in 484 BC, another serious rebellion broke out in Babylon. Xerxes is said to have crushed this with special harshness, including the melting down of the statue of Marduk.[3] The new severe imperial terms that were introduced to the Babylonians and Egyptians signaled a profound shift away from the philosophies of Cyrus and Darius. By increasingly alienating subject populations with oppressive measures, the Achaemenids were cultivating one of the factors that would lead to their downfall a mere 150 years later.

Organizing the army for the invasion of Greece

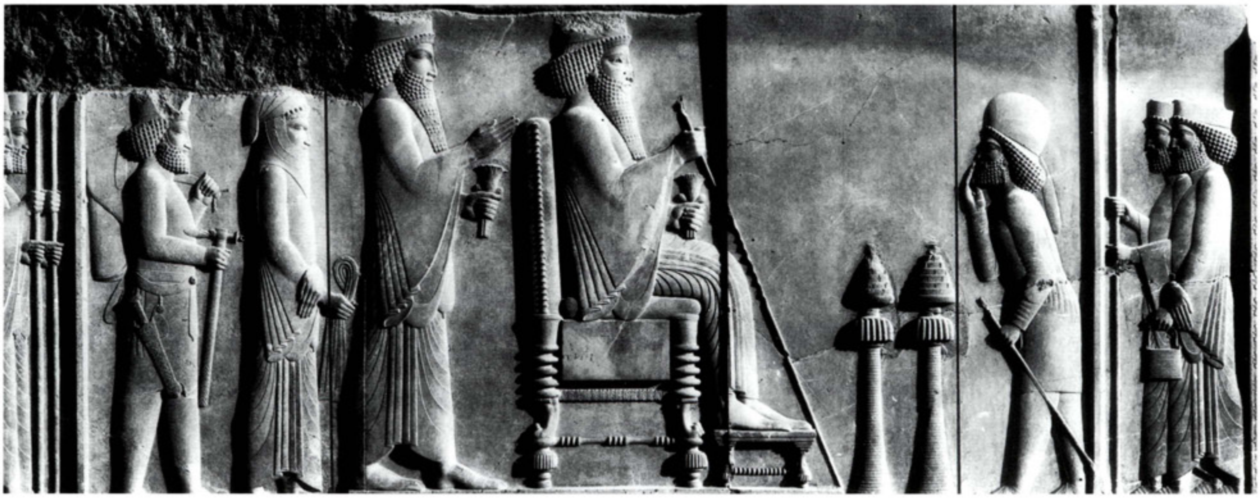
While Egypt and Babylon could be subdued and kept within the Empire, the Greeks were an entirely different matter. Xerxes proceeded to thoroughly reorganize the Empire and build up the imperial military machine for the second invasion of Greece. The Achaemenid Empire was now administratively divided into toparchies, with each of these supervising varying numbers of satrapies within their jurisdiction.[4] In the west, for example, the regions of Anatolia and Armenia were organized under a single toparchy. By the end of the 5th century BC this entire region was headed by Cyrus the Younger,[5] who commanded land forces as well as a formidable navy.[6] In the east there are references to the Soghdians, Bactrians, and Chorasmians as being combined into one administrative (or military) zone.[7]

The so-called Alexander sarcophagus showing a battle between the Greeks and Achaemenids. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

While Herodotus mentions six major commanders as being present in the invasions of Greece,[8] Xerxes has been mentioned as having had seven toparchal commanders.[9] The numbers of toparchies had been reduced to four by the reign of Artaxerxes II.[10] The Achaemenids utilized the decimal system for organizing their field armies,[11] a system not known to have been practiced by the ancient Greeks. The Achaemenid army was divided into corps, regiments, and smaller units, all numbering multiples of ten.[12]

A thorough description of all Achamenid military units and their array of weaponry is beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, an overall introduction to the units involved in Xerxes' campaign, and the weaknesses of the Achaemenid military compared to the Greeks, is covered in this chapter.[13]

The Achaemenids laid great emphasis on selecting the most advantageous position on the battlefield. If an engagement was forced in a theater ill-suited to Achaemenid military operations, engineers would work at making the terrain as conducive as possible. During Xerxes' invasion of Greece, the Athos Canal was literally hacked across the Athos isthmus to facilitate the passage of the imperial fleet, and at Gaugamela, Darius III ordered the leveling of the field to provide maximum mobility and freedom of action for his cavalry and chariots.[14] Assaults were usually led by generals, however exceptions did occur – at Cunaxa, Cyrus the Younger led the charge against Artaxerxes II. During battle the king would usually be placed in the center of the army from where he would command the troops. He was, of course, surrounded by royal elite guards, or "Immortals." According to Xenophon, Cyrus the Great ordered 10,000 of his best fighting men to be organized into an elite unit, called the Immortals.[15] Herodotus notes that the number 10,000 was kept constant by promoting warriors to replace the fallen.[16] Close examination of the Persepolis reliefs and other Achaemenid remains depict these guards carrying bows, quivers, shields, and the akenakes short sword. The Immortals were also armed with ceremonial spears, variously decorated with golden pomegranates or golden apples at their ends.[17] These types of "dual purpose" ceremonial-combat spears were revived by the elite cavalry of the Sassanians, the Savaran, hundreds of years later. Greek sources provide the following description of the men depicted in the Susa reliefs:



The relief from the Persepolis Treasury courtyard depicting Darius seated and Crown Prince Xerxes standing behind the throne. (Topham Picturepoint, Topfoto)

> They serve in the army and hold commands from twenty to fifty years of age, both as foot soldiers and as horsemen … they arm themselves with a rhomboid wicker shield; and besides quivers they have swords and knives; and on their heads they wear a tower-like hat; and their breastplates are made of plates of iron … each man has a bow and a sling…[18]

The *sparabara* (lit. shield-bearers) carried large wicker shields protecting the rest of the formation. Ten of the sparabara formed the front line, followed by nine rows of ten infantry-archers, armed with short swords and archery equipment. The sparabara were sometimes armed with 6ft (1.8m) spears in case enemy infantry reached their lines.

The non-Medo-Persian Iranian contingents comprised mainly the Saka/Scythians, Parthava (Parthians), Chorasmians, Arians, Bactrians, and Soghdians. These were a vital component of the Achaemenid military machine,[19] with Sakas forming a major component of the cavalry, mainly as mounted bowmen. The Bactrians, described by Aeschylus as the "flower of the Persian allies," are alone said to have supplied at least 30,000 mounted troops for the Achaemenids.[20] The Sagarthians from the Iranian plateau fought from horseback and were virtually identical to the Medo-Persians and Saka with respect to their riding costume. Their primary weapon was the wattled lasso with loops on the end,[21] designed to ensnare enemy horsemen or their steeds during battle. The only Sagarthian defensive armament cited is the dagger, and possibly battle axes.[22]

Herodotus reports that the main heavy infantry contingents in the Achaemenid army were composed of Lydians and Assyrians.[23] The Lydians were close neighbors of the Hellenic world, and much of their military doctrine appeared to be of Greek inspiration.[24] Like the Lydians, Assyrian infantry were specifically trained to engage in hand-to-hand fighting, separate from archery. Assyrian archers were heirs to a sophisticated archery tradition, yet their functions become merged with the Assyrian heavy infantry by the Achaemenid high command. The dilution of the Assyrian infantryman's training and battlefield function with archery was undoubtedly a major factor in reducing the effectiveness of Assyrian warriors in Achaemenid service. Babylonian archers may have been mixed with Assyrian spearman and infantry in identical units. Both Assyrians and Babylonians may have been equipped with Iranian-style linen cuirasses by the time of Xerxes.[25]

The Carians were armed with daggers and *drepana* sickle-swords. They are reported in Achaemenid service as late as the battle of Gaugamela.[26] The Egyptians were armed with the long double-curved bow.[27] For hand-to-hand combat, the Egyptians relied on javelins, swords, axes, and spears. They wore linen cuirasses and bronze helmets[28] for protection, and carried large wooden shields. The Libyans were armed with "fire-hardened" javelins[29] and chariots harnessed to four horses, a skill which was adopted by the Greeks.[30] The Ethiopians were armed with spearheads made of antelope horn and rudimentary archery equipment.[31] Arab troops were equipped with swords slung over their backs, and many fought as archers on camels. The Phoenicians fought as marines for the Achaemenids and are described as having "helmets in the Greek style … linen cuirasses … rimless shields and javelins."[32] The Indians were armed with iron-tipped arrows[33] and very large broadswords measuring approximately 31½–39½ in. (80–100cm) in length and approximately 4–4¾ in. (10–12cm) wide.

The Achaemenid cavalry that participated in Xerxes' invasion of Greece appear to have worn scale armor, usually under uniform tunics. They carried spears, archery equipment, and helmets. Not all Achaemenid cavalry would have been protected with scale armor and helmets at this time, mainly due to the difficulties in mass-producing such equipment. Achaemenid cavalry may have utilized linen armor of the Greek style as well. The Scythians, in fact, did use Greek-style greaves and helmets. For hand-to-hand combat, Achaemenid cavalry are reported as having used the *kopis* sword, which was more of a slashing weapon. The Paphlagonians from Anatolia's interior were fielding excellent cavalry for the Achaemenids as late as the early 4th century BC.[34]

The Achaemenids relied primarily on Phoenician sailors for the navigation of their ships and the maritime transportation of troops. Each ship had a command contingent of 30 men of Iranian descent (Persians, Medes, or Sakas).[35] The captain of the ship was known as the *navpati* or *naupati* (lit. naval commander). It is worth noting that non-Iranians also attained the rank of captain, one example being Psamsineith, a navpati of Egyptian descent. This state of affairs was to remain after the invasions of Greece. Herodotus reports a total of 1,207 combat vessels taking part in Xerxes' unsuccessful invasion of Greece. These included 300 Phoenician-Syrian, 150 Cypriot, 100 Cilician, 200 Egyptian, 100 Ionian, 50 Lycian, and 70 Carian vessels. The Achaemenid navy also worked steadily at improving the performance and power of its vessels. On the eve of Darius' invasion of Greece, Achaemenid galleys were able to transport up to 500 troops. It is reputed that up to 3,000 transport ships may have been involved in the shipping of vital supplies and horses.[36]

Xerxes invades Greece: limits of empire

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Xerxes in Western eyes is his massive invasion of Greece. Xerxes' invasion has had an enduring impact on Greco-Roman and wider Western civilization in general. In Xerxes' view, the invasion of Greece was part of the "unfinished business" of his father, Darius the Great. To Achaemenid eyes, the Greeks had defied the authority of the King and had to be bought to heel. Failure to take successful action against Greek defiance would further undermine the authority and prestige of the imperial throne, and the Empire itself. Xerxes chose to renew the war with Greece just ten years after the battle of Marathon.[37] Herodotus reports Xerxes' invasion force as numbering five million men, an impossibility considering the demographic and military factors of the Empire at the time. Young's recent estimates have revised the size of the invasion force to 120,000 men while Olmstead has set it at 180,000.[38]

The crossing of Xerxes' army of around 120,000 troops from Asia to Europe was achieved by building a gigantic bridge across the Hellespont. The structure was two massive floating bridges composed of 670 ships tied together by ropes.[39] The invasion had been well planned from the logistical aspect. Well-stocked supply dumps had already been established all along Xerxes' axis of advance, and stocked from the Empire's main European supply base at Dorsicus.

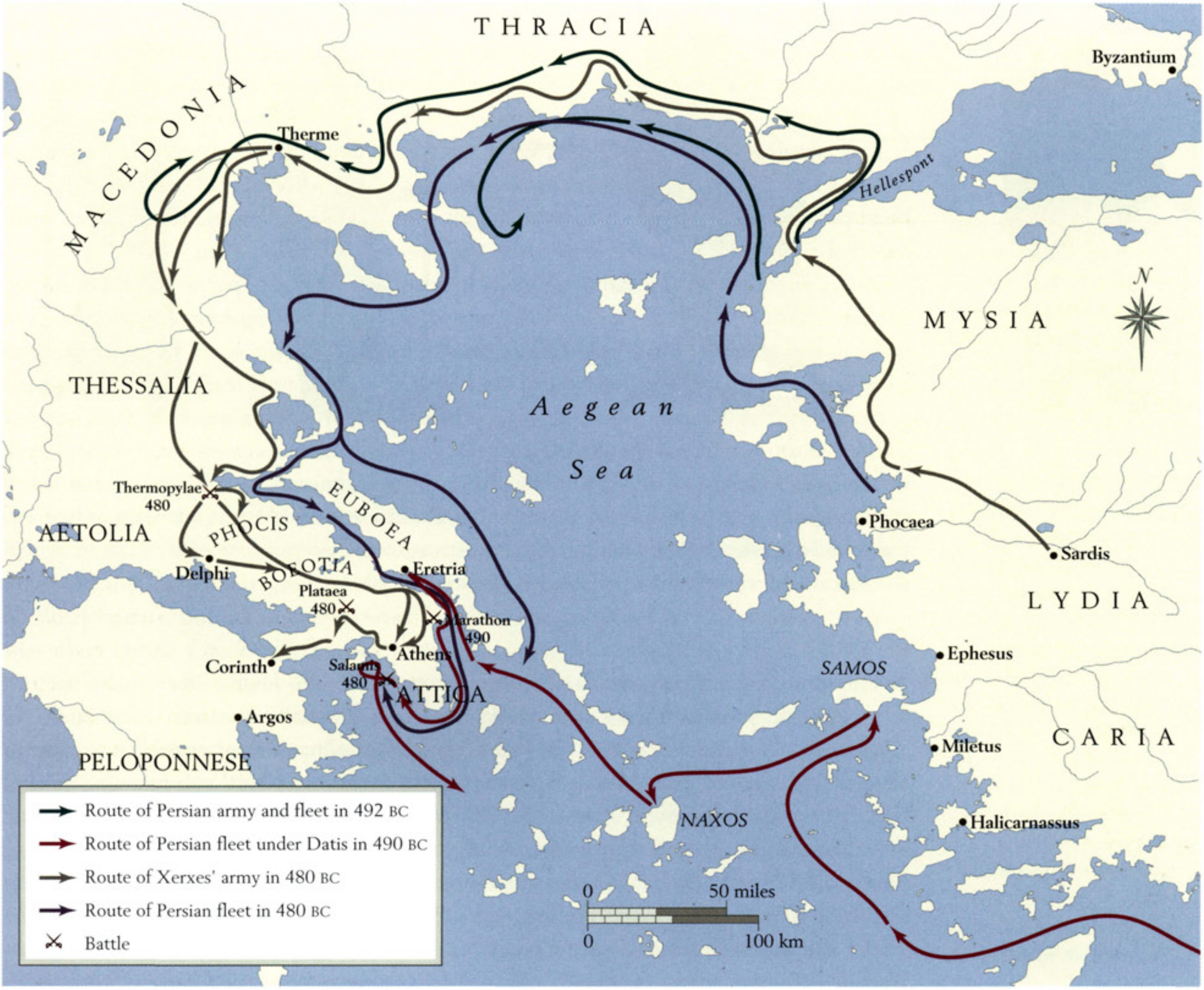
After the catastrophe that befell the fleet of Mardonius at the Isthmus of Athos during Darius' invasion of Greece, Xerxes ordered his engineers to find a way of getting his fleet through the isthmus: a huge labor force was organized to hack a canal 1.5 miles (2.4km) long and wide enough for two ships to be rowed alongside each other, across the peninsula. Researchers and geologists have recently confirmed that the construction of the Athos Canal, one of the largest engineering works of Classical times, was undertaken in 480 BC by Xerxes.[40]

Thermopylae

Xerxes' invasion force advanced successfully through Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly. This situation soon changed as Xerxes approached the narrow pass at Thermopylae on September 17, 480 BC. The Mede contingents assaulted the Greek defenders at the pass, only to be repelled with very heavy losses. This was mainly due to two factors. First, the narrowness of the pass prevented the Achaemenids from pressing home their vast numerical advantage. Second, the pass was defended by possibly the premier hand-to-hand combat warriors of the day. The Achaemenid high command had had a foretaste of the formidable qualities of the Greek infantryman a decade earlier at Marathon, but still lacked troops capable of defeating the Greeks in close-quarter combat. As at Marathon, the launching of volley after volley of arrows upon the Greeks did little to alleviate the situation. It was during this stalemate that a traitor from the Greek lines arrived at Xerxes' camp to inform him of a hidden passage that would enable his army to surround the Greeks. As the Achaemenid host made its maneuver, the

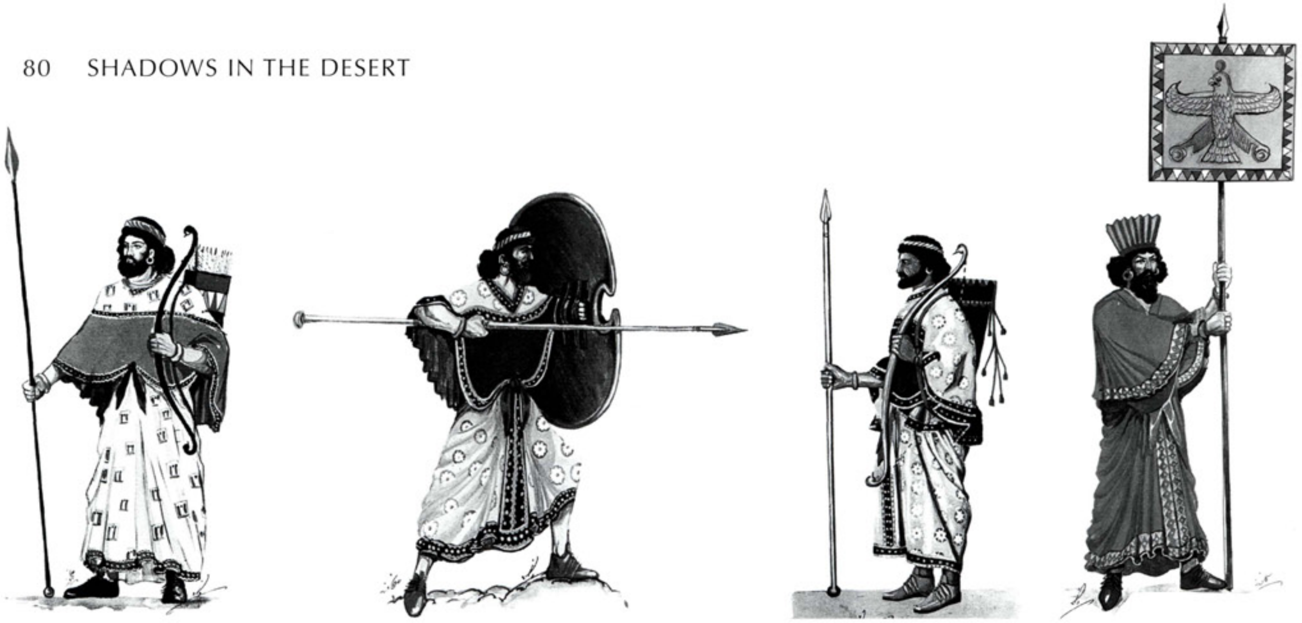
Ceremonial gold akenakes scabbard from the Oxus Treasure, 5th–4th century BC. The gold is embossed with scenes of lion hunting. (© The British Museum/ HIP/Topfoto)

The Greek and Persian wars 492–480 BC


THRACIA
Byzantium
MACEDONIA
Therme
Hellespont
MYSIA
N
THESSALIA
Aegean Sea
Thermopylae 480
AETOLIA
PHOCIS
EUBOEA
Phocaea
Sardis
Delphi
BOEOTIA
Eretria
Plataea 480
Marathon 490
LYDIA
Athens
Ephesus
Corinth
Salamis 480
ATTICA
SAMOS
Argos
Miletus
CARIA
PELOPONNESE
NAXOS
Halicarnassus
0 50 miles
0 100 km
Route of Persian army and fleet in 492 BC
Route of Persian fleet under Datis in 490 BC
Route of Xerxes' army in 480 BC
Route of Persian fleet in 480 BC
Battle

Greeks, realizing their dire tactical situation, decided to retire. However, some of the defenders, most famously the 300 Spartans led by their king, Leonidas, stood their ground and fought to the last man. Greek losses are reported as 4,000, but few doubt that they were able to inflict very high losses on the Achaemenids. The Greeks now worked hard to build up their defenses at the Isthmus of Corinth.

After the forcing of Thermopylae, Xerxes' army broke into Attica and engaged in the systematic destruction of towns such as Thespiai and Plataea.[41] The invasion force soon approached Athens. The city was largely abandoned, except for the Acropolis, which was barricaded with wood.[42] Xerxes' troops occupied the elevated ground facing the Acropolis (the Hill of Ares), and proceeded to shoot flaming arrows into the recently installed wooden defenses. The defenders fought furiously and hurled large stones as the Achaemenids attempted to scale the Acropolis. Xerxes' attempts to capture the Acropolis were frustrated until the discovery "behind the gates [of the Acropolis] ... a place where



From left, Achaemenid spearman, spearman ready for battle, soldier of the Immortals, Achaemenid standard with a homa on it. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

no one was keeping guard."[43] The invaders took advantage of this ingress and stormed the Acropolis where the Greeks again fought to the last man. Athens was then looted and torched on September 27. Militarily, this action served no purpose other than to harden the Greek determination to resist the imperial invasion.

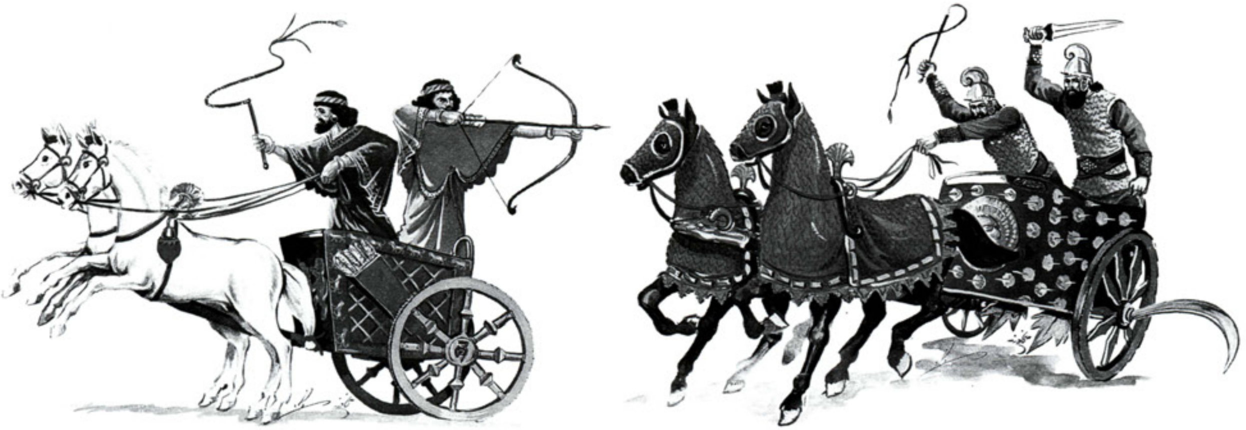
Salamis

Xerxes' powerful land invasion had been accompanied by his large navy of 1,207 ships.[44] The main purpose of this was to protect the left flank of his army, which faced the Aegean Sea. A major storm had put a number of these ships out of commission, but the fleet pressed on and joined battle with the Greeks in the naval battle of Artemisium (late September 480 BC), where Xerxes lost 30 vessels. The battle ended in a tactical draw. Another 200 of Xerxes' ships were destroyed in another storm after Artemisium on September 17–18. Despite this major blow, the fleet did force another clash with the Greeks on September 19, inflicting serious losses. Xerxes' navy now acted to finally secure the waters around Greece, because as long as Greek naval forces existed, Xerxes' land invasion forces were vulnerable. The Athenian statesman and admiral Themistocles realized that fighting in the open sea favored Xerxes' numerically superior navy. He persuaded the rest of the Greeks to sail into the narrow Salamis channel, and entice Xerxes into following them.

Xerxes' ally, Artemisia, the Queen of Halicarnassus, strongly advised Xerxes against following Themistocles into Salamis. She correctly pointed out that the large Phoenician ships would be outmaneuvered by their smaller Greek counterparts in the narrow channel (approx. 1 mile/1.6km wide). Artemisia was also aware that Xerxes held a decisive advantage. A powerful fleet now blocked the eastern exit of Salamis. All Xerxes had to do was to maintain his blockade, eventually starving the Greek fleet out.[45] However, he and General Mardonius opted for direct offensive action, perhaps hoping to secure a dramatic "grand victory." The fleet sailed westwards into the Saronic Gulf, then swung north, passing by Piraeus harbor. Xerxes probably believed that all that remained was to pursue the Greek fleet and destroy them in the narrow Salamis Channel. An elite contingent was landed on the island of Psyttaleia to support this operation.

As at Marathon, the Greeks had sprung a deadly trap. Themistocles had beached a portion of the Greek fleet just above Salamis harbor. By choosing to enter the Salamis bottleneck, Xerxes squandered his chance of defeating the Greeks by blockade. His ships were now forced to sail along a narrow axis, negating their numerical advantage. Just as the vanguard elements of Xerxes' fleet sailed into the channel, Themistocles sprung his deadly stratagem. The Greek triremes sliced into the hulls and oars of the Achaemenid fleet, severely damaging them and forcing them to halt. The triremes then closed ranks with the ships, allowing the Greek warriors to board the enemy vessels and engage in hand-to-hand combat. The crew and soldiers of Xerxes' ships were slaughtered. The sea was filled with Xerxes' dead and dying mariners, and littered with the broken hulks of disabled ships. However, the momentum of Xerxes' fleet ensured that more ships blindly entered the cauldron, meeting the same fate as their comrades and crashing into those vessels lying dead in the water. Themistocles now launched his second naval force from the harbor of Salamis itself, surrounding the Achaemenids engaged inside the channel. Xerxes' surviving ships within the Salamis channel now attempted to retreat. However, they rammed into those vessels that were continuing to advance into the channel to fight.[46] In the course of the battle Ariabignes, the Achaemenid admiral and brother of Xerxes, was killed. The Greek hoplites led by Aristides now landed on the island of Psyttaleia, where they destroyed the Immortal regiment there, including the nephews of Xerxes. Multitudes of Medes, Persians, and Sakas had drowned by this time and the few who made it to shore were slain by the Greeks. Xerxes witnessed the entire Salamis disaster from his throne perched on top of a nearby hill. Enraged, Xerxes ordered the execution of a number of his Phoenician naval commanders for "cowardice." The naval battle of Salamis is as significant to history as the battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

The Salamis naval disaster obliged Xerxes to conduct an orderly withdrawal back to Sardis in Asia. The remnants of the Achaemenid fleet were now based at Samos, never again to challenge the Greeks at sea. Nevertheless, much Greek land, especially in the north, still remained under Achaemenid occupation. As Xerxes withdrew, he placed a large force, reported by Herodotus[47] at 300,000 men but probably fewer than one-third that number, under the command of General Mardonius. Mardonius' northern Greek allies could field at least 30,000 hoplites. Nevertheless, Mardonius did attempt a "public



Double harnessed war-chariot with archer, scythed chariot. The first Achaemenid scythed chariots were seen by the Greeks of Xenophon in Babylon. The Achaemenid Empire was the last major world empire to deploy chariots in a military fashion. They reinvented the chariot, by building scythes onto the axle ends, a lethal weapon against infantry. Achaemenid scythed chariots were designed to punch holes in enemy lines, and presumably then head towards the enemy's rear. The horses were blinkered and driven by a single driver, who might have worn scale armor. Scythed chariots were used by Darius III in a vain attempt to confront Alexander the Great. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*) relations" offensive, without much success. He sent offers of truce to the Athenians, but offers to help rebuild Athens were rejected.

The Athenians had consistently asked for Spartan support, and this materialized in what was to become the battle of Plataea, which occurred in August 479, barely a year after Xerxes' wars. Mardonius was encamped just north of the Asopos River near Plataea, a small town roughly 30 miles (50km) to the northwest of Athens. Mardonius' formidable army was faced by a Hellenic coalition (Athenians, Spartans, various Greek hoplites, and other city-state allies) amounting to 40,000 men; these were led by a Spartan named Pausanias. The forces of Pausanias (south of the Asopos River) and Mardonius engaged in a process of observation and maneuver lasting between seven and ten days. Mardonius ordered his cavalry to conduct harassment raids against the Greeks, disrupting the Greek supply dumps and routes and poisoning wells. Pausanias decided to retreat to more defensible positions southwards and gave the order for an evening withdrawal. The Greek center did so in good order; however the Athenians (left flank) and Spartans (right flank) failed to withdraw until the onset of dawn, which was observed by Mardonius. The latter rapidly crossed the river with his forces. The archers unleashed a terrible barrage of missiles, forcing the Spartans to take cover under their overlapping shields. Mardonius focused his main effort against the 11,500 Spartans, while his north Greek allies began to attack the 8,000 Athenians. In a virtual repeat of the debacle at Marathon, the Achaemenids witnessed their opponents weather the worst of the arrow storm with their combination of tough individual armor and overlapping shields. Like the Athenians at Marathon, the Spartans made a rapid and determined charge into the Achaemenid lines, catching them totally unprepared. The Achaemenids were forced to cast away their bows, and in what can only be described as an act of desperate courage, tried to break the Spartan spears with their bare hands. No amount of determination, however, could stop the Spartan phalanx. The infantry and archers suffered very heavy losses and the actions of the Iranian cavalry made little military impression on the battlefield. Meanwhile, the Athenians had made their victorious stand against the northern Greek (Theban) allies of Mardonius, near the Temple of Hera, forcing them to retreat in haste.

Mardonius and the remnants of his army had no recourse but to retire across the Asopos River. The Iranian cavalry were able to cover the withdrawal, but the Greeks maintained the impetus of their success. Mardonius was killed by the Spartan commander Aeimnestus; all subsequent attempts by the Achaemenids to recover Mardonius' body failed. At this juncture, Artabazus had assumed command and ordered an immediate withdrawal, allowing the Greeks to overrun the main Achaemenid camp where the last contingents of Mardonius were destroyed. Artabazus and his troops retreated across the Hellespont into Asia Minor. It is worth noting that Artabazus had opposed Mardonius' original dawn attack as too risky.[48] However, Artabazus' advice went unheeded, just like Artemesia's at Salamis.

The battle of Plataea was the last and largest land battle fought by the Achaemenid army in Europe. The destruction of Mardonius and his forces at Plataea signaled the Empire's last attempt at territorial expansion. However, the Achaemenids suffered yet another military disaster just as their forces were being crushed at Plataea. The Greeks had also destroyed the last nucleus of Achaemenid naval power off the Ionian coast at

OPPOSITE The eastern staircase of the Apadana at Persepolis with its relief of elite Mede and Persian soldiers. Two of the Persian soldiers on the right carry the "cello" shield. Achaemenid shields proved inadequate against Greek weapons, one of the reasons for Darius' defeat by the tough, but numerically inferior, hoplite formations of Greece. To the left of the soldiers is an example of the classic Iranian hunter-prey beasts theme, also common to the Saka Paradraya. (© Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis)

Samos, at the battle of Mycale. The Spartans who sailed to the Hellespont discovered that Xerxes' bridge connecting the continents had been destroyed prior to their arrival. The Athenians attacked the city of Sestus, situated at the narrowest point of the Hellespont. The city fell after several months and the Achaemenid satrap was executed.

By the late 460s BC, Greece witnessed the rise of the Athenian Empire and the Delian League. The League flexed its military muscles and boldly launched a strike into Achaemenid-held Pamphylia in Asia Minor. The naval battle was joined on the Eurymedon River where the Phoenician ships of Xerxes were soundly beaten. Having scored a decisive naval victory, Cimon the Athenian commander landed his troops and destroyed the Achaemenid land forces encamped at the river. This not only reaffirmed Greek military ascendancy over the Achaemenids, but also, shattered the latter's hopes of a future (third) invasion of Greece. Cimon secured much loot from the Medo-Persian camps, which was apparently used in rebuilding the Acropolis. Greek military confidence

was growing steadily. However, they were not yet ready to conquer the Achaemenid Empire. They knew little of Persia or the Achaemenid military. Information on the latter was soon to be provided by the Greek mercenaries who served in Cyrus the Younger's rebellion, men known to history as the Ten Thousand of Xenophon.

Achaemenid prestige had been badly damaged, as Darius' unavenged failure at Marathon was dwarfed by the subsequent defeats of Xerxes and Mardonius. The impact of these failures must have taken a profound psychological toll on Xerxes, of whom we hear rather little in the years after his battles in Greece. He was finally assassinated in his bedchambers in 465 BC.

Achaemenid military weaknesses against Greece

Scholars have yet to adequately explain why the Achaemenids never made substantive efforts to rectify their military shortcomings against the hoplites and later Macedonian phalanxes.[49] The Achaemenids proved unable to successfully address a number of serious military weaknesses. Attempts to improve training and equipment after the failed invasions of Greece did little to alter the military imbalance.

The Achaemenid infantry were inferior to the Greeks with respect to armor, hand-to-hand weapons, and close-quarter martial training. Achaemenid akenakes short swords proved inadequate against the Greeks in hand-to-hand fighting. The Greeks were able to hack at the unprotected arms, necks, and faces of their opponents while the shorter akenakes blades of the Achaemenids failed to inflict similar damage upon fully armored Greek troops fighting in phalanxes. Persian infantry spears are described by Greek historians[50] as being shorter in length than their Greek counterparts. At Thermopylae, Achaemenid spears proved too short against the 9ft (2.7m) iron-head Spartan lance. This meant that the Achaemenid infantryman was vulnerable to the lance thrusts of the Spartan combined phalanx, but unable to strike back at his opponents with his own spear.

The Achaemenid emphasis on rapid advance and archery meant that no specialized armor had been developed for close-quarter fighting. The soldiers who entered Greece had no greaves or armor to protect themselves against close-quarter blade weapons.[51] Interestingly, even the Saka-style scale armor proved inadequate against the lance thrusts of the hoplites. The inferiority of armored protection for Achaemenid infantry has been cited as a major Achaemenid military weakness during the Greco-Persian wars. Achaemenid shields also proved inadequate. The wood and leather "cello-violin" and wickerwork shields were vulnerable to the powerful thrusts of the hoplite spear and the later Macedonian *sarissa,* or pike. Iranian infantry lacked adequate headgear protection and many did not even have helmets. High-quality helmets and armor did exist in the Achaemenid army, but never became standard issue across the entire army. To help rectify their weaknesses in infantry, the Empire began to recruit greater numbers of Greek mercenary troops into its battle order. By the time of Alexander's conquests, many Greek mercenaries were serving in the Persian army, in an attempt to remedy the Persian weakness in infantry. In comparison to the Achaemenid infantry, individual Greek infantry, trained for close-quarter hand-to-hand fighting, were able to deflect much of the Persian archery, thanks to their armor, large shields, and phalanx formations. Achaemenid archers, like many of the infantry, lacked adequate hand-to-hand combat weapons, making them highly vulnerable in close-quarter combat.[52]

A major weakness of the Achaemenid military was the multi-ethnic nature of its contingents. While the Iranian contingents, such as the Medo-Persians and Saka, could communicate easily, the same was not true of non-Aryan units such as Egyptians or Ethiopians. In what can be described as a military paradox, the Achaemenid ability to field large numbers of foreign troops was also a major liability. The language barrier was only one of the many factors preventing meaningful military coordination between Iranian/Aryan units and foreign contingents. Each nationality also fought with its own weapons, tactics, and military traditions, raising major difficulties in battlefield coordination.[53] This factor must have also taxed the logistics system during war, as each nationality had to be replenished with its own particular military supplies. The Achaemenids did organize a central command system which attempted to harmonize and coordinate the vast array of nationalities in its service, yet this body failed to produce a coherent and focused fighting force.[54] Moreover, the willingness of foreign units to fight and die for an empire invading the European continent could not have been very high. It is worth noting that many of these men hailed from regions that had been forcibly incorporated into the Empire.[55] The lack of martial enthusiasm among the non-Iranian contingents is vividly demonstrated by the accounts of Herodotus and Xenophon who describe the diverse nationalities as being forced forward by whips during Xerxes' invasion of Greece.[56] Loyalty was apparently a problem as well. A number of Greeks from Asia Minor who served in the Achaemenid armies are reported as having defected to their kinsmen during the invasions of Xerxes; other disaffected nationalities may have acted as "fifth columnists."[57] These incidents undoubtedly provided the desperate Greeks with valuable intelligence.

In contrast to the invaders, the Greeks were fighting for their very existence as a people, culture, and nationality. The Darius-Xerxes invasions resulted in much destruction and loss of life on the Greek mainland. Every Greek soldier was fighting for his home, family, and nation. The epic struggle was also characterized by religious overtones as many of the sacred statues of the Greek gods were taken from Greece and shipped to Persia. The Greeks, who profoundly revered their gods, were especially outraged by the "sacrilegious" actions of the Achaemenids, notably the burning of the Acropolis and the desecration wrought upon the Temple of Aglauros.[58] When the Greek navy set sail to do battle with Xerxes' fleet they sang the *paianas,* whose verses include "Children of the Greeks go on, free the motherland… Now is the fight for everything." The Greeks never forgot the damage and destruction that was wrought on their homeland, people, and temples during these invasions. This memory soon culminated in a zeal for vengeance, a dynamic that was to be personified in Alexander the Great.

Chapter 5

The Achaemenid Empire from Artaxerxes I to the rise of Macedon

Artaxerxes I and Darius II

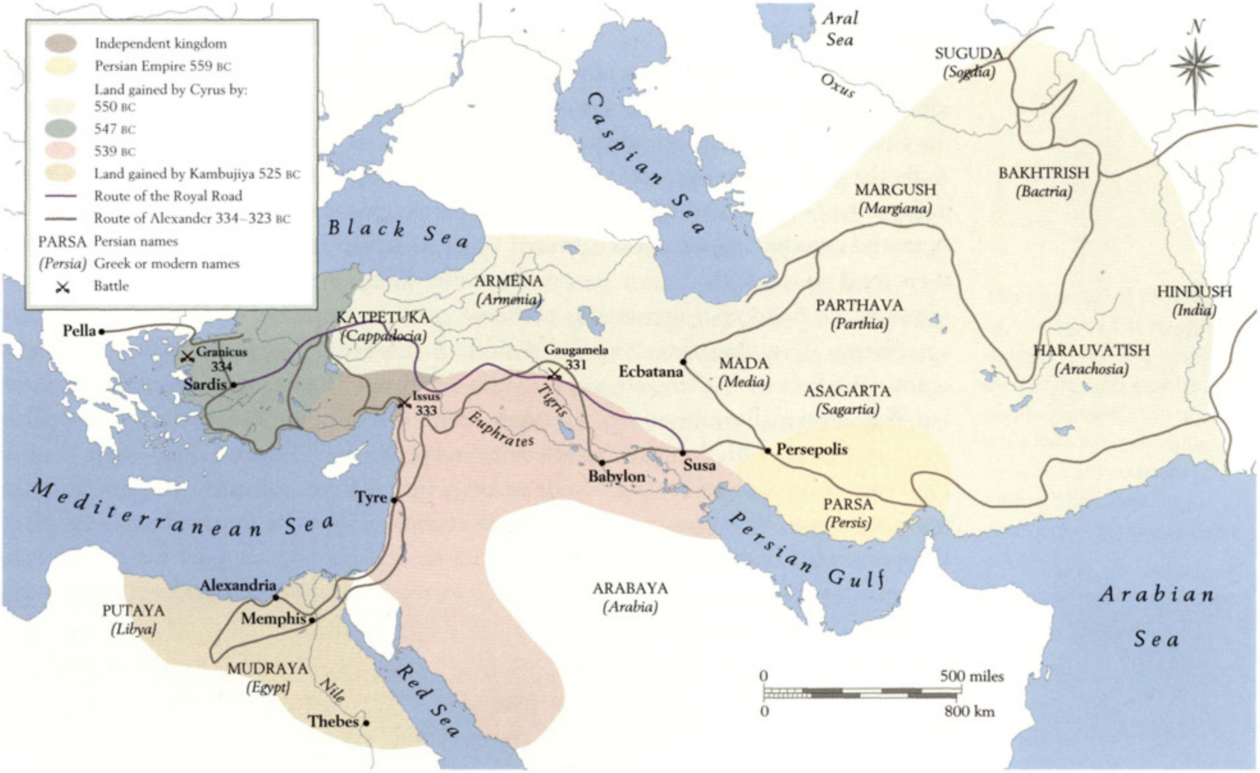
Gilt silver shield boss from the Oxus Treasure. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Artaxerxes I (Old Persian: Artakhshathra) became king in 464 BC.[1] Xerxes I had been reputedly assassinated by Artabanus (one of his sons) and a eunuch named Spitames. Both of them, along with Crown Prince Darius, were put to death by Artaxerxes I.[2] Artaxerxes continued Cyrus the Great's policies toward the Jews, as indicated by his further support for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. Due to his support of Judaism, Artaxerxes' name is recorded with honor in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.[3] Plutarch in *Artaxerxes* described the King as being "a gentle and noble spirit."[4]

Cultural contacts with Greece also increased under Artaxerxes, with Hellenic culture gaining influence beyond the Ionian coast, namely further east into the interior of Anatolia. Themistocles, who had crushed the Achaemenid navy at Salamis, now sought sanctuary from Artaxerxes, fleeing the Athenians who had ostracized him. He reputedly promised his new patron that they would conquer Greece, but died before he could realize his promise.

In 495 BC, the Egyptian rebel Inarus came from Libya to conquer Upper Egypt. The Achaemenids managed to hold onto Memphis, and launched counterattacks on land and sea. General Megabyzus crushed

The Achaemenid Empire


Independent kingdom
Persian Empire 559 BC
Land gained by Cyrus by:
550 BC
547 BC
539 BC
Land gained by Kambujiya 525 BC
Route of the Royal Road
Route of Alexander 334–323 BC
PARSA Persian names
(Persia) Greek or modern names
Battle
Aral Sea
Oxus
SUGUDA (Sogdia)
N
Caspian Sea
Black Sea
MARGUSH (Margiana)
BAKHTRISH (Bactria)
ARMENA (Armenia)
KATPETUKA (Cappadocia)
PARTHAVA (Parthia)
HINDUSH (India)
Pella
Granicus 334
Sardis
Gaugamela 331
Ecbatana
MADA (Media)
HARAUVATISH (Arachosia)
ASAGARTA (Sagartia)
Issus 333
Tigris
Euphrates
Persepolis
Babylon
Susa
Mediterranean Sea
Tyre
PARSA (Persis)
Persian Gulf
Alexandria
Memphis
ARABAYA (Arabia)
Arabian Sea
PUTAYA (Libya)
MUDRAYA (Egypt)
Nile
Red Sea
Thebes
0 500 miles
0 800 km

Inarus' army with the aid of Egyptian allies.[5] Arshama, the Achaemenid satrap of Egypt, counterattacked at sea and defeated the fleet sent by Athens to aid the Egyptians. Although Egypt remained relatively quiet for the next 60 years, it was to stay restive to the last days of the Empire.

In 448/447 BC, Artaxerxes I signed the Peace Treaty of Callias with the Delian League, led by Athens. The treaty officially put an end to the wars of conquest initiated by Darius the Great. Both sides recognized their respective spheres of interest and pledged not to interfere in each other's affairs. The Achaemenids would refrain from interfering in the Aegean, while the Greeks would recognize Persian authority over Anatolia, especially along the Ionian coast. Persia also pledged to provide autonomy for its Ionian subjects. Mainland Greek support for the Ionian Greeks had been a major source of contention, and one of the catalysts of the invasions of Darius the Great. While Callias attempted to rationalize the geopolitical delineation of Hellenic and Achaemenid spheres of interest, the treaty, like many others through history, failed to alleviate the state of distrust between the two powers.

Athenian power and prestige had grown steadily after the military successes against Darius the Great and Xerxes. The Delian League, formed originally in 478 BC, now possessed a professional navy capable of rapidly deploying against the Achaemenids. Athens, however, had transformed the league into an "Athenian Empire." Athenian policies and interventions were a major factor in mobilizing the Peloponnesian League of Sparta to prevent the Athenians from gaining absolute supremacy.[6] The Achaemenids eagerly exploited the tensions between Athens and Sparta with bribery and diplomacy. They now supplied prodigious amounts of gold darics (featuring the "Persian Archer") to exacerbate the Atheno-Spartan rivalry. Ironically, these "coin archers" had far more influence than the imperial archers of the past Darius-Xerxes wars. Persian gold was now the Empire's major strength in the Aegean theater.

By the 420s BC, envoys were traveling between the Spartans and Persians, but the King had yet to be informed of the definitive Spartan position. Artaphernes, an envoy of Artaxerxes to the Spartans, was captured by an Athenian ship in 424 BC. The Athenians then tried to send their own proposals to the King, bypassing the need for envoys. However, no firm peace agreements occurred until the ascension of Darius II, and these agreements were short-lived, as the Athenians assisted Pissouthnes, satrap of Caria, against the Empire. Athenian general Lykon did betray the satrap to the Achaemenids,[7] but Pissouthnes' illegitimate son, Amorges, continued to fight the Empire with Athenian support. Fed up with Athenian interference in his domains, Darius II sided with Sparta. He ordered his satraps in Asia Minor to enter into a formal alliance with the Spartans against Athens. With Persian gold, the Spartans were able to pay for the expenses of their Peloponnesian fleet. Persian financial, maritime, and military support for the Spartan military proved decisive in forcing Athens to surrender by 404 BC. The Spartans had also confirmed their support for the Achaemenids by acknowledging their supremacy along the Ionian coast. The seriousness accorded to the Aegean theater by the Achaemenids is reflected in the appointment of Tissaphernes as commander in chief for the entire military of the Aegean by the early 400s BC.

Artaxerxes I died peacefully in 425 BC, and was survived by his two sons, Xerxes II and Secydianus. Xerxes II became king, but was assassinated in less than two months by Secydianus. In 423 BC, Secydianus was killed by an illegitimate son of Artaxexes I, known by the Greeks as Nochus (lit. bastard). Nochus, who had been the satrap of Hyrcania, adopted the title "Darius II." After defeating an attempt on his own life by a certain Arsites, Darius II held onto the throne until 404 BC. Xenophon does mention rebellions in Media[8] in 409 BC and the Caspian Sea (Cadusians)[9] in 405 BC. However, these were neither widespread nor of any significant duration, posing no serious threat against the Empire. Darius II was also involved in the suppression of revolts in Lydia and Syria in 413 BC.

Artaxerxes II and Cyrus the Younger

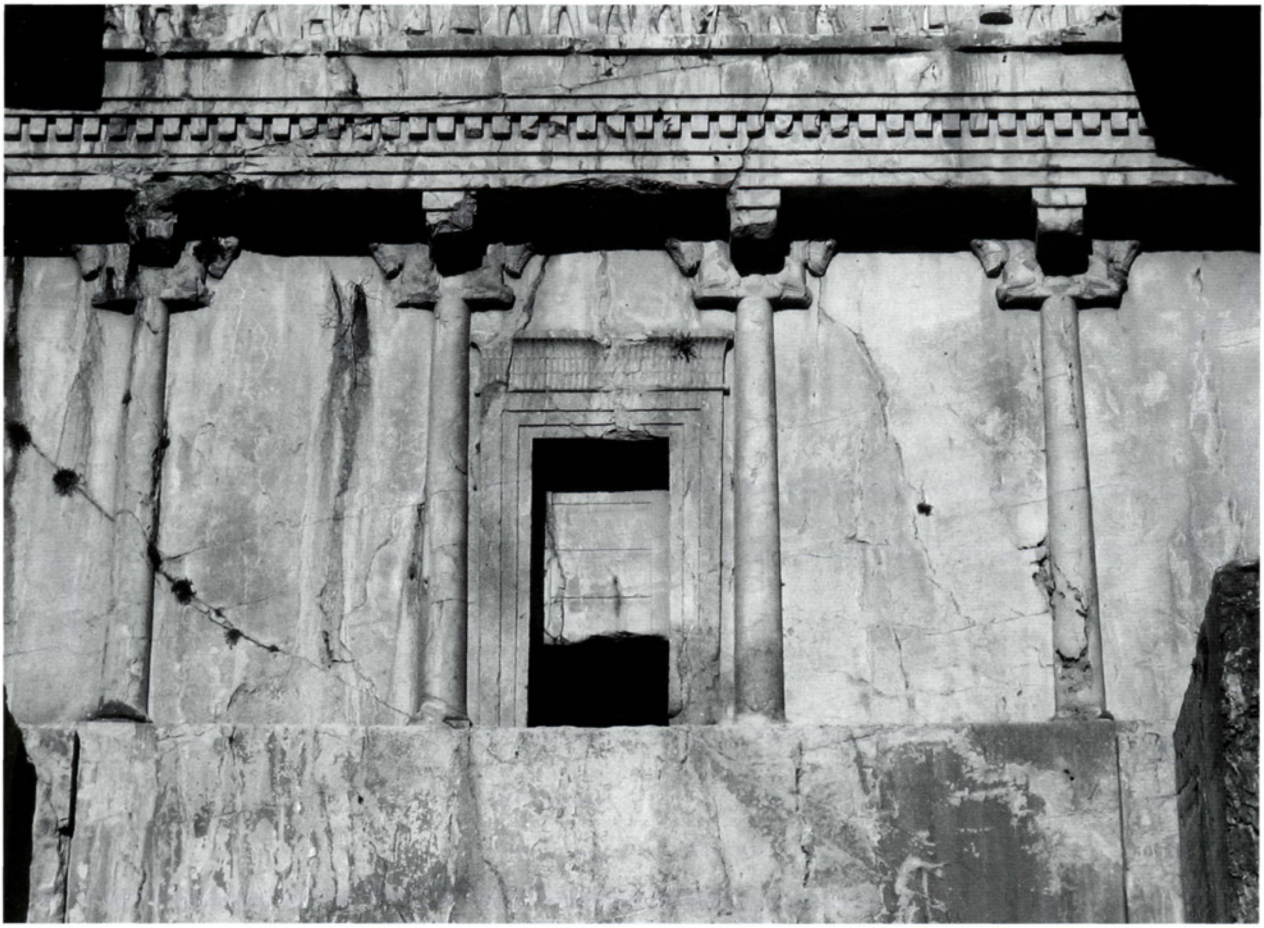
Darius II had two sons with his wife Parysatis: Artaxerxes II (r. 404–359 BC) and Cyrus II (423–401 BC), also known as Cyrus the Younger. Parysatis had favored Cyrus, and used her influence to have Cyrus installed as satrap of western Anatolia, notably Cappadocia, Phrygia, and Lydia. Cyrus became the local commander of the Achaemenid garrisons in the region in 408 BC. In this position, he quickly gained immense popularity and won the loyalty of the Greek and non-Greek populace of his satrapy.

In 405 BC, Darius summoned his sons to his deathbed. Despite Parysatis' efforts, Artaxerxes II was declared King. Cyrus was deeply distrusted by the ruling house in Persia, and as soon as Darius II had died, Cyrus the Younger was accused by Chithrafarna

(Greek: Tissaphernes) (d. 395 BC), the satrap of Caria formerly posted in Lydia, of treason against his brother Artaxerxes II. Cyrus then tried unsuccessfully to assassinate the new king.[10] Thanks to Parysatis' intercession, Cyrus was spared from certain death, and was allowed to return to his post in western Anatolia.

As soon as Cyrus returned to his satrapy he began to engage in a military build-up. Cyrus' official position was that he was preparing an expedition against the tribal forces of Pisidia, nestled within the Tarsus Mountains. These assertions were duly rejected by Chithrafarna, who remained openly suspicious of Cyrus' true intentions. Cyrus' recruitment of Greek warriors, especially the battle-hardened veterans of the Peloponnesian Wars, did little to assuage these suspicions. Cyrus' Greeks were led by the Spartan commander Clearchus, while Xenophon (an Athenian), later became the commander of the rearguard. Xenophon's *Anabasis* remains an invaluable record of the events pertaining to Cyrus the Younger's failed bid for kingship.

Despite Cyrus' best efforts, the size (and motive) of his build-up could not be kept secret. Chithrafarna reported to the throne that Cyrus' army was far too large for a campaign against Tarsus mountain tribes. Alerted to Cyrus' true intentions at last, Artaxerxes now began to raise his own military forces. The number of troops reported

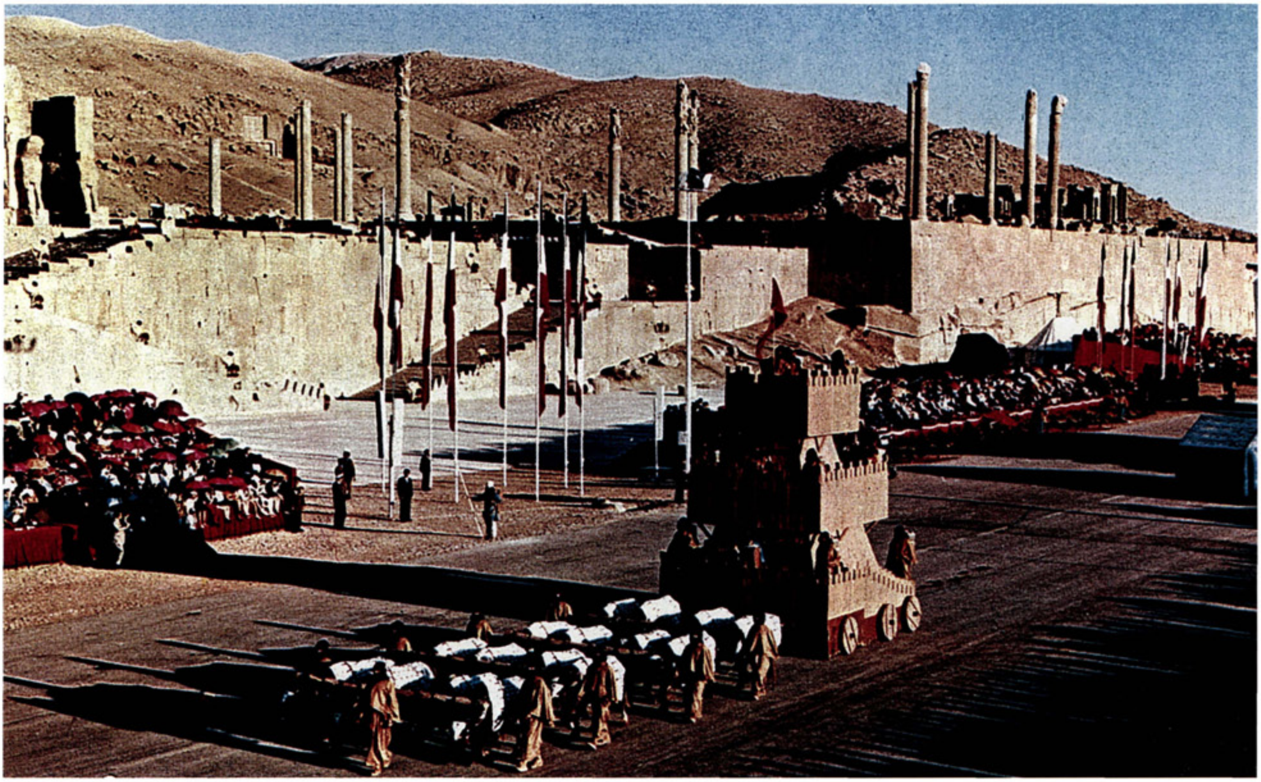


This close-up of the tomb of Artaxerxes I at Naghsh-e-Rustam shows the detail of the pillars, and may be a good representation of what the columns of the Apadana at Persepolis looked like before its destruction. (© Livius.org) by Arrian is cited at a fantastic total of 114,000 for Cyrus and 1,200,000 for Artaxerxes.[11] While modern estimates vary, the numbers are generally agreed to have been much lower, perhaps at 30,000 and 60,000 men respectively. More convincing are Arrian's description of Greek (and a few Thracian) troops in Cyrus' service, reported as ranging between 10,000 and 14,000 warriors. The majority of these were Spartans; the rest were 2,500 Thracian and Greek peltasts and 200 excellent Cretan archers.

The battle of Cunaxa

Cyrus moved east with his force in 401 BC. Interestingly, Cyrus did not declare his claim to the throne until having arrived at Thapsacus on the Euphrates River. He then joined battle against Artaxerxes at Cunaxa (modern Tell Kuneise near Baghdad), Babylon.

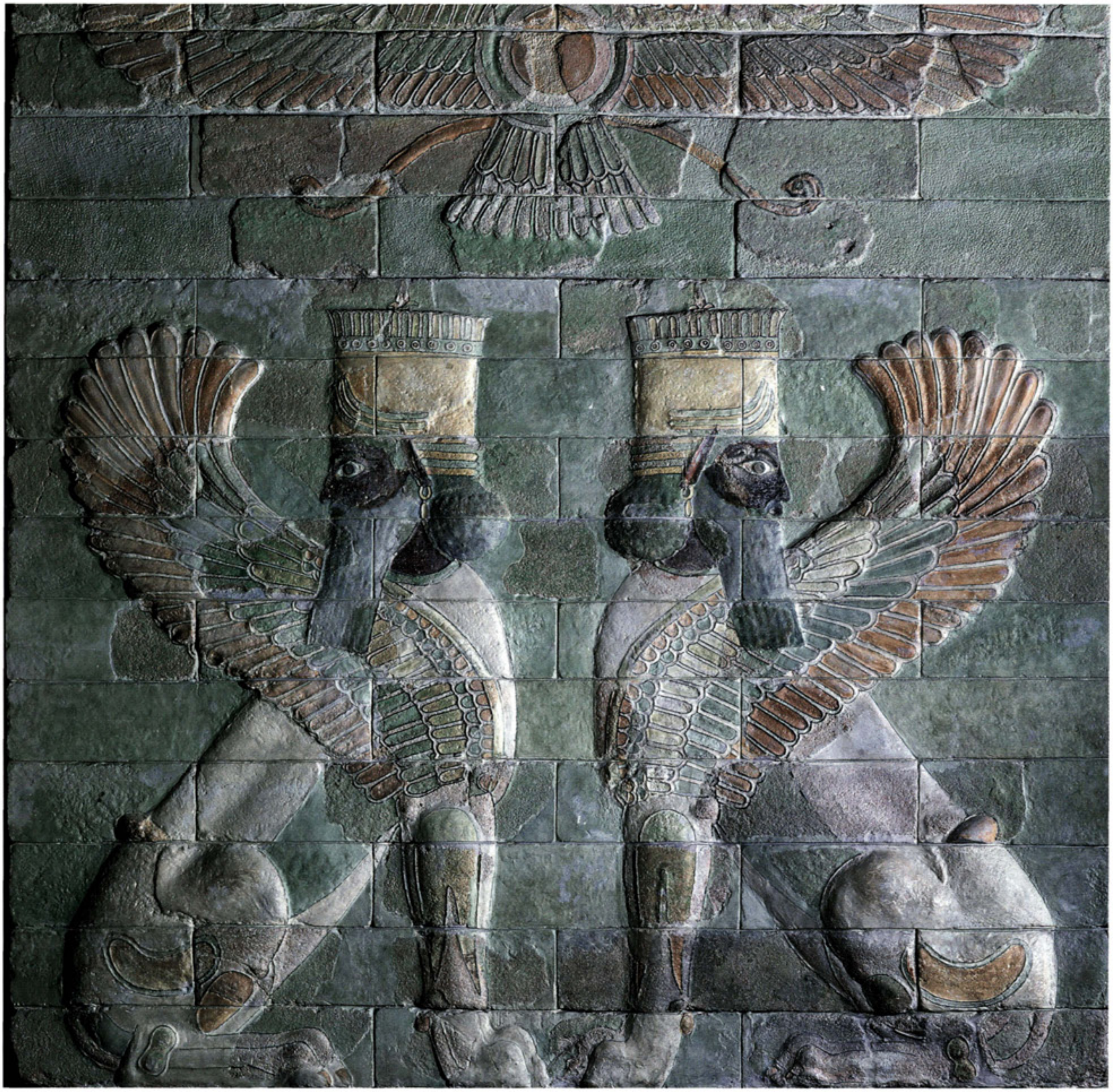
The battle of Cunaxa was hard fought and could have been won by Cyrus, had he not been killed. The Greek troops of Cyrus' right wing were victorious against Artaxerxes' Egyptian recruits, archers, and cavalry led by Chithrafarna. Artaxerxes' attempt to outflank the enemy by using his own right wing was met directly by Cyrus, who duly charged with his own left wing against his brother. Cyrus' action, however, had opened a critical gap in his battle line. This was adroitly exploited by Chithrafarna, who broke through and reached Cyrus' headquarters. Cyrus was now engaged in a duel against Artaxerxes, whom he wounded with his spear and threw off his horse. In the ensuing disorder, Cyrus was himself struck by a dart to his temple. Cyrus then fell to the ground and was killed by a stone after having been hit by a second dart, to his knee.[12]



Reconstruction of a wheeled Achaemenid siege tower. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

The Greek mercenary troops were now stranded and their commanders taken hostage by Chithrafarna. The Greeks were obliged to withdraw from Babylon into Anatolia, and trek westwards back to Greece; without cavalry support, it was an epic journey duly immortalized in the *Anabasis*. The subsequent five-month retreat of the "Ten Thousand" to Greece was to profoundly influence Greek military philosophy, which was to crystallize in the conquests of Alexander the Great nearly 70 years later.

Wiesehofer offers the following description of Artaxerxes' tactics at the battle of Cunaxa:



Glazed brick panel from Susa of two winged lion gods with a proto-Zoroastrian symbol hovering overhead. The lion entities are Babylonian in inspiration while the winged being is reminiscent of early Assyrian forms. (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

> There were flashes of bronze, and the spearpoints of the enemy became visible. These were cavalry with white armor on the enemy's left … next to them were soldiers with wicker shields, and then came hoplites with wooden shields reaching to the feet. These were said to be Egyptians. Then there were more cavalry and archers. These are marched in tribes … each in a dense oblong formation. In front of them, and in considerable distances apart from each other, were … the scythed chariots.[13]

This description vividly illustrates the importance that the Achaemenid military placed on mobility and the beginnings of the rapid armored thrust doctrine with the appearance of scythed chariots. Archery saturation fire was unleashed prior to the actions of the cavalry, in accordance with earlier doctrines. Irrespective of Achaemenid "soldiers with wicker shields," the inherent weaknesses in heavy infantry had led Artaxerxes to rely on Egyptian hoplites, just as Cyrus the Younger had relied on Greek mercenaries. However, the greatest tactical shift was the increasingly important role that was being assigned to the cavalry.

Artaxerxes II and war with Sparta

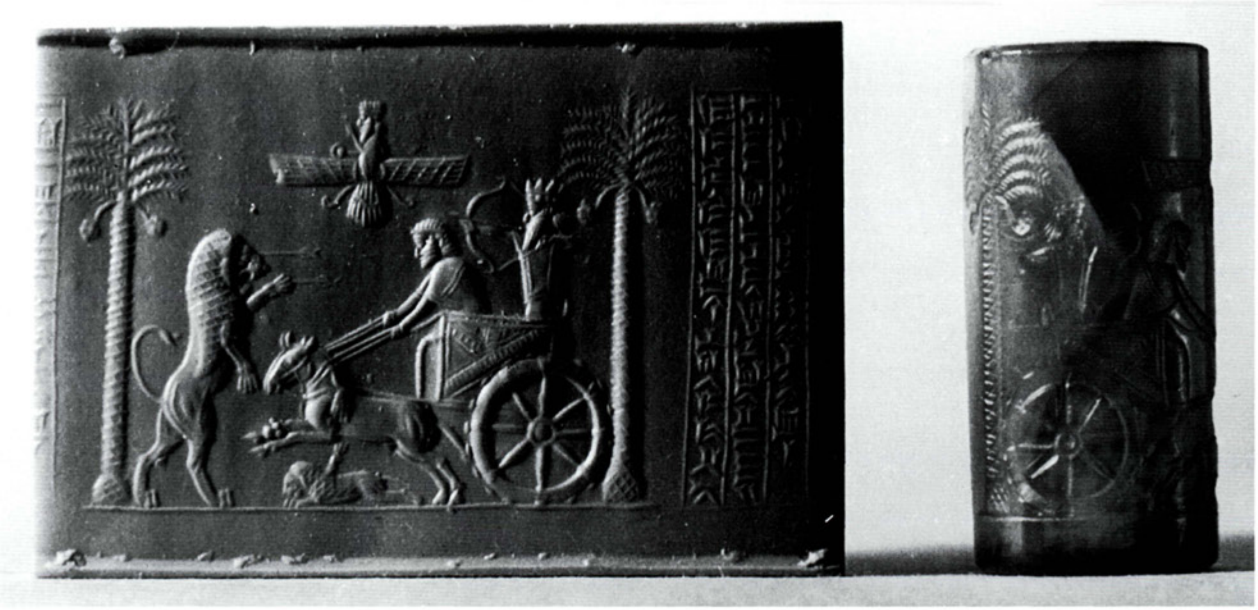
Relations between the Empire and Sparta deteriorated and led to war in 400 BC, just one year after Artaxerxes II's victory at Cunaxa. The cause was, again, the Greeks of Asia Minor. The fighting lasted 13 years (400–387 BC) with Artaxerxes II slowly gaining the upper hand. The King had engaged in gilded diplomacy: Athens was being revitalized at Spartan expense, thanks in part to Persian gold.

Meanwhile, Greece's exhausting wars worked to the Empire's advantage. The constant wars meant that neither Athens nor Sparta had absolute supremacy in the Hellenic theater, and that there was no risk of pan-Hellenic unity at Achaemenid expense. Having battered each other to exhaustion, the Greeks now asked the King to mediate an end to their wars. This resulted in the "King's Peace" accord of 387–386 BC, also known as the Peace of Antalkidas, after the Spartan envoy to Artaxerxes. The Greeks collectively agreed to abstain from any interference in the Empire's domains in Ionia–West Anatolia. Persian gold had again achieved what Achaemenid arms could not: containing the Greeks, at least in the short term. Nevertheless, the Empire had no hope of assuaging the Greek *revanche* sentiment, born of the earlier Darius-Xerxes wars.

Artaxerxes II faces defeat in Egypt, and the satrapies revolt

Despite the mirage of success in the Aegean, the Empire was weakening, militarily and politically. This had been dramatically illustrated by the Egyptian rebellion in 405 BC. Artaxerxes II finally launched his expedition into Egypt by 373 BC, greatly assisted by Greek mercenaries, 12,000 troops equipped with new 12ft (3.6m) pikes, and 8,000 regular hoplites.[14] Despite this, the Egyptians beat back the Achaemenids: Egypt had achieved full independence from the Empire. This was a serious blow against Artaxerxes' prestige.

Just as Artaxerxes' Egyptian campaign collapsed, a number of the western satraps broke into open revolt. Datames (satrap of Cappadocia) declared his independence from the throne in 368–367 BC. Ariobarzan (satrap of Daskylion) soon supported Datames, followed by Aroandas (satrap of Armenia), Autophradates (satrap of Sardis), and Mausolos (satrap of Caria). The situation became especially dangerous as the satraps now had the support of Spartans, Egyptians, and all of Anatolia.[15] Fortunately for the Empire, Aroandas, now leader of the revolt, betrayed his comrades to Artaxerxes. Disunity



Achaemenid agate cylinder seal depicting a royal lion hunt. The inscriptions are in Elamite, Babylonian, and Old Persian. (© Topham Picturepoint)

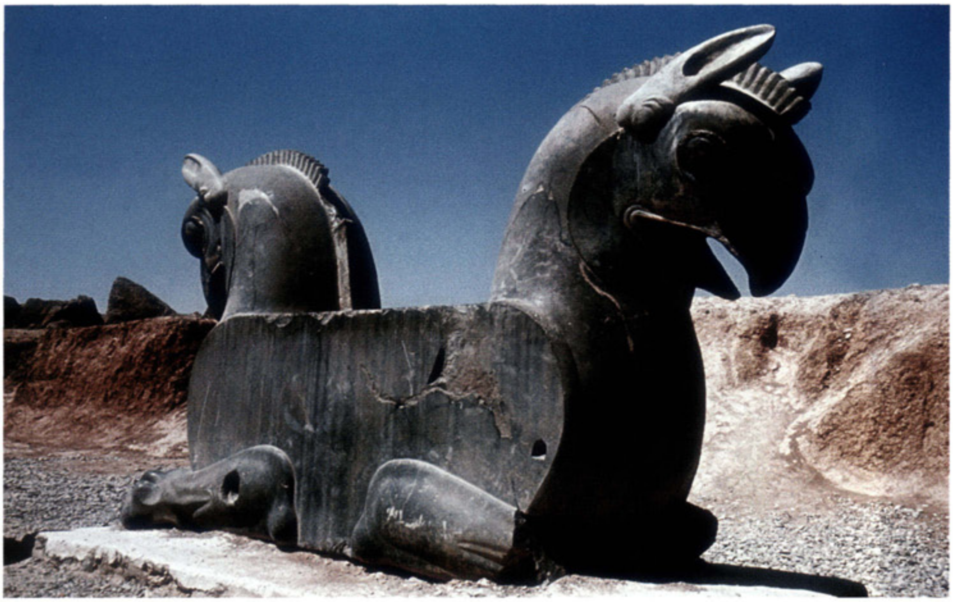
among the rebels greatly facilitated the King's task of destroying them and killing Ariobarzan and Datames. Meanwhile, thanks to internal dynastic disputes in Egypt, no Egyptian force arrived to support the rebels.[16] Had the rebels maintained their unity, they may have been able to march into Persia and possibly depose the Achaemenids.

Having defeated the rebels, Artaxerxes refrained from further punitive measures and granted generous pardons to all those who had conspired against him. Artaxerxes was acutely aware of the weaknesses of his empire. Had he ordered the rebels to be executed, he may have faced yet another revolt, a situation that the Empire was too weak to contain. The overwhelming presence of Greek mercenaries in the revolts was indicative of the alarmingly weak state of the Achaemenid military. The Empire was now unquestionably in decline and was becoming increasingly vulnerable to an external invasion.

The reign of Artaxerxes III

Artaxerxes III (359–338 BC) became king soon after the death of his father, Artaxerxes II, in 359 BC. His ascension was particularly brutal as he secured his title by putting his brother and family members to death, and he is known for having been especially ruthless and cruel.[17] Just as he assumed the throne, Artaxerxes III was faced with a string of revolts. The new king ordered Artabazus (satrap at Daskylion, Phrygia) and Aroandas (satrap of Mysia, previously satrap of Armenia) to disband their Greek mercenary troops. The satraps duly refused and rebelled against the King. Athens successfully intervened on the side of the rebels, but withdrew its support after threats made by Artaxerxes III. Despite the support of Thebes, the rebellion collapsed, obliging Artabazus to seek sanctuary with Philip II of Macedon by 353–352 BC.

With Anatolia finally secured, Artaxerxes III could now proceed to win back what his father had lost: the Kingdom of Egypt. Artaxerxes prepared and dispatched an expedition to Egypt in 351–350 BC, but these forces were totally defeated by Pharaoh Nectanebo II. This was yet another blow to the Empire's authority and prestige, leading to a fresh spate of revolts



OPPOSITE The Persian bull or sacred cow (*gauw*) on top of one of the columns in the great hall of Persepolis. The gauw was common in many of the Aryan rituals of ancient Iran and India and a branch of this spread by certain Mithraic cults from Persia to the Roman Empire, briefly becoming Christianity's greatest rival. (akg-images/ Gérard Degeorge)

LEFT The bird-god or bird-dragon at Persepolis, the artistic basis of the simurgh, homa, and prototype for senmurv motifs. These were revived as standards for the coat of arms of the elite Sassanian cavalry, the Savaran. The Persepolis bird-dragon was highly popular among the Scythians and Sarmatians, who identified it as "simurgl." The simurgl or simurgh motif was to profoundly influence European arts, such as the Gothic style. (Topfoto/HIP)

by 345 BC in parts of Cilicia, Phoenicia, and Palestine. These were all (with the exception of Sidon) put down within the same year. The continued independence of Egypt did little to repair the Empire's martial reputation and imperial prestige. This prompted Artaxerxes III to organize another military campaign against Egypt, again recruiting the services of professional Greek soldiers. Artaxerxes III himself led the army into Egypt in 343 BC. Sidon was subdued as Artaxerxes marched towards Egypt. The campaign was overwhelmingly successful by 342 BC, forcing the Egyptian leadership into exile in Nubia.

The success of the Egyptian campaign may have distracted Artaxerxes III from dangerous developments taking place in the Hellenic world. Isocrates (436–338 BC), an Athenian orator, had urged the Greeks in his *Panegyrics* to unite into a pan-Hellenic crusade against Persia. That unity was to come with Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC), who made a successful bid to unite the Greeks under his leadership. The Greek city-states' attempts at resisting Philip II ended in failure at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC. Artaxerxes III made no attempt to influence these developments and certainly offered no support against Philip, who was now the master of the Aegean.

It would appear that that the Empire's constant focus on Athens and Sparta had led to a failure at appreciating the significance of military and political developments in northern Greece, especially Macedonia. The military developments there were especially dangerous, notably in the Macedonian deployment of the sarissa-phalanx system, within a combined arms doctrine. It did not take long for the Greeks, now united and led by Macedonia, to aggressively wield that formidable military machine against Persia. Philip's murder in 336 BC did little to change the new balance of power in the Hellenic world. The mantle of pan-Hellenic leadership simply passed to Philip's son, Alexander III (r. 356–323 BC). Demosthenes (384–322 BC) bitterly opposed Macedonian leadership, which he viewed as being more dangerous to Greek democracy than the Achaemenid Empire. These sentiments were forever laid to rest after Alexander defeated the anti-Macedonian revolt and put the city of Thebes to the torch. Persia's days were now numbered.

Chapter 6

Darius III and the fall of the Empire

Darius III: heir to a tottering empire

Diodorus alleges that Artaxerxes III was poisoned by the eunuch Bagoas, who held the position of grand counselor or vizier. Bagoas then slew Artaxerxes' sons, except Artaxerxes IV (Greek: Arses), whom he placed in power, although Bagoas was the real authority behind the throne.[1] However, these historical narratives are far from certain, as indicated by a cuneiform document in the British Museum stating that Artaxerxes III died of natural causes.[2] The majority of historians agree that Artaxerxes IV attempted to poison Bagoas two years after his enthronement, but failed. Bagoas retaliated by killing the King himself. Once again, Bagoas exercised his considerable influence to place another favorite of his on the throne in 336 BC, a champion nobleman named Codomannus, son of Arsham (Arsames). Arsham was the grandson of Ostan (Ostanes), one of the brothers of Artaxerxes II. Before his ascension, Codomannus was a royal courtier.[3] He was a brave warrior who distinguished himself in battles against the Cadusians,[4] and appears to have spoken fluent Greek.[5] Once enthroned, Codomannus adopted the title of Darius III (r. 336–330 BC), and almost immediately asserted his independence from Bagoas. The eunuch now plotted to poison the new king. Bagoas' plot was discovered, however, and Darius forced the eunuch to drink his own poison.[6]

When Darius III became king, he was faced with yet another revolt in Egypt that had been underway since 337 BC. King Khababash was now in control of large parts of Egypt, with his power centered in Memphis. Darius managed to defeat the Khababash revolt in 336 BC, the same year he became king, but his initial success could hardly mask the fact that the Empire was now prone to rebellion by disaffected subjects. Another problem was that the satraps were not necessarily loyal to the throne. The wealth and estates,[7] greed and corruption of the nobles and government officials had grown exponentially, while the general population was being greatly impoverished due to gargantuan interest rates, as high as 40 to 50 percent, and high taxes. By this time the economy of the Empire was but a shadow of its former self, mainly due to the exorbitant costs of having to constantly suppress revolts. The loss of revenues from places such as Anatolia, India, and the coastal regions of Egypt had also been a major economic blow.[8] While the Iranian peoples were not making moves towards independence, the same was not true of the Phoenicians, Syrians, Egyptians and, of course, the Ionian Greeks. These factors, combined with the aforementioned military weaknesses, made Persia totally unprepared to face one of the greatest conquerors the world had ever seen: Alexander the Great.

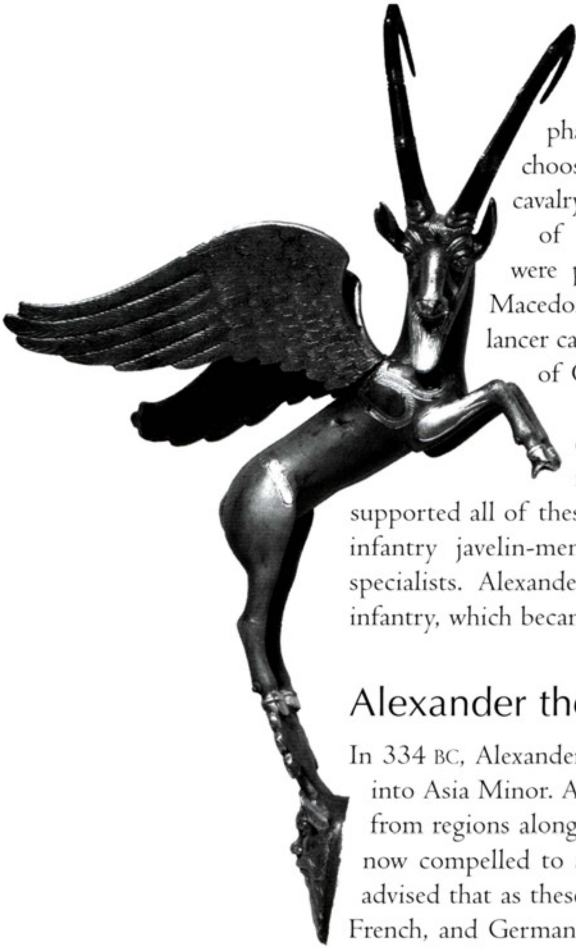
The rise of Hellenic power

The League of Corinth had authorized King Philip II of Macedon to initiate a war of vengeance against Persia. This was also a "sacred" war, because of the desecration of temples during Xerxes' invasion. Generals Attalus and Parmenion were dispatched by Philip to Asia Minor. They were entrusted with the liberation of those Greek subjects who lived under Achaemenid rule. Their armies were highly successful and managed to rapidly advance in Ionia. Soon, regions such as Troy were under Greek rule. The military significance of the Attalus–Parmenion campaigns was two-fold. First, the Hellespont had now fallen permanently under Greek control. This meant that the Greeks now had a "beachhead" in Asia Minor to act as a forward post in the imminent invasion of Persia. The second significance to the Greek high command was that Achaemenid military resistance in Asia Minor (at least in Ionia) could be easily overcome.

Philip, however, was assassinated in 336 BC before he was able to launch the formal invasion of Persia, leaving the task to his son, Alexander III (r. 336–323 BC). Arrian reports that Alexander's main reason for war was the accusation that his father Philip had been killed by Darius' operatives.[9] More significant was the affirmation by the Corinthian League that Alexander was now the *hegemon*, entrusted with the "sacred" war against Persia.

Alexander's army totaled 40,000 fighting troops.[10] Diodorus reports a total of 32,000 infantry (including 1,000 archers) and 4,500 cavalry (including 1,800 Macedonians and 1,800 Thessalians).[11] Alexander emphasized the importance of diverse weapons systems

A view of the Tachara hall at Persepolis. (akg-images/ Gérard Degeorge)



Achaemenid winged ibex from the western marches of the empire. The pose shows Greek influence, and the ibex's hooves stand on the face of an Egyptian demon. (© Louvre, Paris, France/ Peter Willi/ The Bridgeman Art Library)

working as one unit on the battlefield, an innovation still seen in all successful modern armies today. The role of the Macedonian phalanx was to forcibly fix the enemy in a position of Alexander's choosing. The decisive strikes were then delivered by the Macedonian cavalry (right flank of phalanx) and the Thessalian cavalry (left flank of phalanx). While the latter's role was primarily defensive, they were perhaps the Hellenic world's most effective "heavy" cavalry. The Macedonian cavalry aggressively attacked in a wedge formation. Additional lancer cavalry were now found in allied Thracian units, similar to the Lydians of Cyrus' day.

The cavalry strikes were followed up by Alexander's own heavy elite infantry (*hypaspists*) who would engage the enemy; these would in turn be followed by the Macedonian phalanx. Alexander supported all of these formations with effective units of archers, auxiliary hoplites and infantry javelin-men (Agrianians). For siege work, Alexander deployed artillery specialists. Alexander himself relied on two handpicked squadrons of cavalry and infantry, which became his personal royal guard.

Alexander the Great defeats Darius III

In 334 BC, Alexander made a formal landing with his army across the Hellespont and into Asia Minor. As noted previously, the Achaemenids had already been pushed back from regions along the Hellespont by the latter part of Philip's reign. Darius III was now compelled to act as he realized the gravity of Alexander's threat. The reader is advised that as these events have been exhaustively and thoroughly narrated by British, French, and German historians, the highlights below are meant to convey the "other" Achaemenid perspective.

The Granicus River

As Alexander advanced deeper into Asia Minor, Darius III conferred with his general staff. Memnon, a Greek general in Achaemenid service, suggested that Darius simply withdraw in order to pull Alexander deeper inside Achaemenid territory. The Achaemenids would then make a determined naval attack and landing in Macedonia, forcing Alexander to withdraw. Memnon's counsel indicates that he was aware of the awesome power of Alexander's army. However, Alexander had left a sizable force in Europe under Antipater, perhaps in anticipation of such a move.[12] Darius' general staff decided to reject Memnon's counsel in favor of making a stand near the river of Granicus, not far from ancient Troy, in May 334 BC.

Darius' army was drawn up with the left wing of Lydian, Phrygian, and Cappadocian cavalry under the command of Memnon and Arsaman (Arsamnes). The Paphlagonian cavalry were situated behind the left wing. The right wing was composed of Gurgan cavalry of northern Persia, led by Spithrodat (Spithrodates), Darius' son-in-law. The center of Darius' army was composed of cavalry from a variety of the Empire's regions. The infantry and archers were placed to the rear of the cavalry, probably on the understanding that they were no match for their Greek counterparts.[13] Classical sources are somewhat contradictory when reporting the size of Darius' forces. Diodorus reports 100,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry, whereas Arrian cites 20,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry.[14] Pirnia has estimated the total number of troops in Darius' army as 35,000–40,000, making it roughly the same size as Alexander's forces.[15] These were composed of 4,000–5,000 Greek mercenary troops under Memnon; the rest being divided roughly evenly between cavalry and infantry-archers. The Greek mercenaries were especially valuable as they had the best training and equipment to combat the invasion force. Alexander took these enemy warriors into account when he delivered his masterstroke.

Darius deployed his army on the east bank of the Granicus River. Alexander crossed the river and ordered a cavalry attack from his left flank supported by light infantry. Darius responded by reinforcing his right flank (Spithrodat) against this attack and pushed back the Greeks. However, the attack by Alexander's left flank was simply a ploy to distract Darius' command. Alexander now led a cavalry attack with his Companion cavalry in a wedge formation, which crashed through the center and routed the Achaemenid cavalry.[16] Alarmed at this rupture, the elite nobles counterattacked Alexander's cavalry. Though brave and resilient, many were cut down, yet one of them injured and nearly killed Alexander before he himself was slain. Having punched a hole in the center, Alexander wheeled left and sliced into the Gurgan cavalry of the right flank now engaged against the Macedonian left flank. This allowed the deadly phalanxes to charge through the center to engage and destroy the Achaemenid infantry-archers, many of whom were impaled by the tall sarissa lances. Had the Greek mercenaries not been held in reserve, they may have been able to contain or salvage this disaster. The battle was now lost. Darius' left flank and the remnants of other formations withdrew, yielding the field to Alexander. Classical sources generally report Greek losses at 115 men.[17] Achaemenid casualties are cited as being much higher, Diodorus cites 10,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry killed.[18] Although Alexander's cavalry charge followed by the phalanx engagement must have resulted in very heavy Achaemenid losses, the numbers cited by classical sources appear somewhat inflated.

Gold ceremonial dagger from Hamadan, 17in. (43cm) long. Hilt decorated with lions' heads.
(R. Sheridan, Ancient Art and Architecture)

The retreat of Darius' battered army across the Taurus Mountains led Mithrene, the local Iranian satrap of Sardis and Lydia, to submit to Alexander. This was followed by the capture of places such as Melitene and Halicarnassus, both of which offered fierce resistance. The fall of Halicarnassus obliged commanders Orontopates and Memnon to evacuate by sea. Alexander then proceeded to conquer the Greek city-states, a number of whom fought against him. These operations allowed for advances to be made into the interior of Anatolia. Western Asia Minor was now permanently lost to the Empire. This region offered two options for Alexander: he could either strike further into eastern Anatolia towards Persia, or south into Syria and Palestine. Alexander's conquest of the Ionian region also cut off the potentially dangerous Persian fleet of 400 ships from all of its Aegean bases, effectively neutralizing that force.[19]

Darius and the high command were now convinced of the crushing military superiority of Alexander's army: Alexander's infantry-cavalry cooperation was outstanding. The Empire also had no tactical answer to the Macedonian phalanx. Much hope had been placed in the cavalry, however, Iranian equestrian military technology and tactics were as yet unable to specifically counter the sarissa-phalanx or the Hellenic combined-arms doctrine as a whole. This meant that in the coming engagement the Greek mercenary force of Memnon would be fully deployed in the front lines. Their numbers were increased to an impressive 30,000 for the upcoming battle.

Bronze standard Achaemenid weight in the shape of a lion. Weights like this were used in the appraisal of gold and silver. The lion motif was a potent battle standard in the armies of Iran until the later 20th century. (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

Memnon enjoyed the highest confidence of Darius and the Aryan nobles. His strategy was essentially the same as before: forcing Alexander to withdraw to Macedonia to prevent further Hellenic conquests in Asia.[20] Achaemenid hopes for the realization of these plans were dashed with Memnon's untimely death by disease. Darius found no suitable replacement for Memnon, obliging him to assume the command of the entire army himself.[21] The Achaemenid high command had in the meantime transferred its main base of operations further east to Babylon, where Darius assembled a much larger force for his next battle with Alexander. According to Diodorus, Darius' forces are reported at a fantastic total of 400,000 infantry and 100,000 cavalry.[22] Quintus Curtius provides a reduced estimate of 220,000 infantry and 73,200 cavalry.[23] There is near unanimity with respect to the presence of 30,000 Greek mercenaries in Darius' forces.

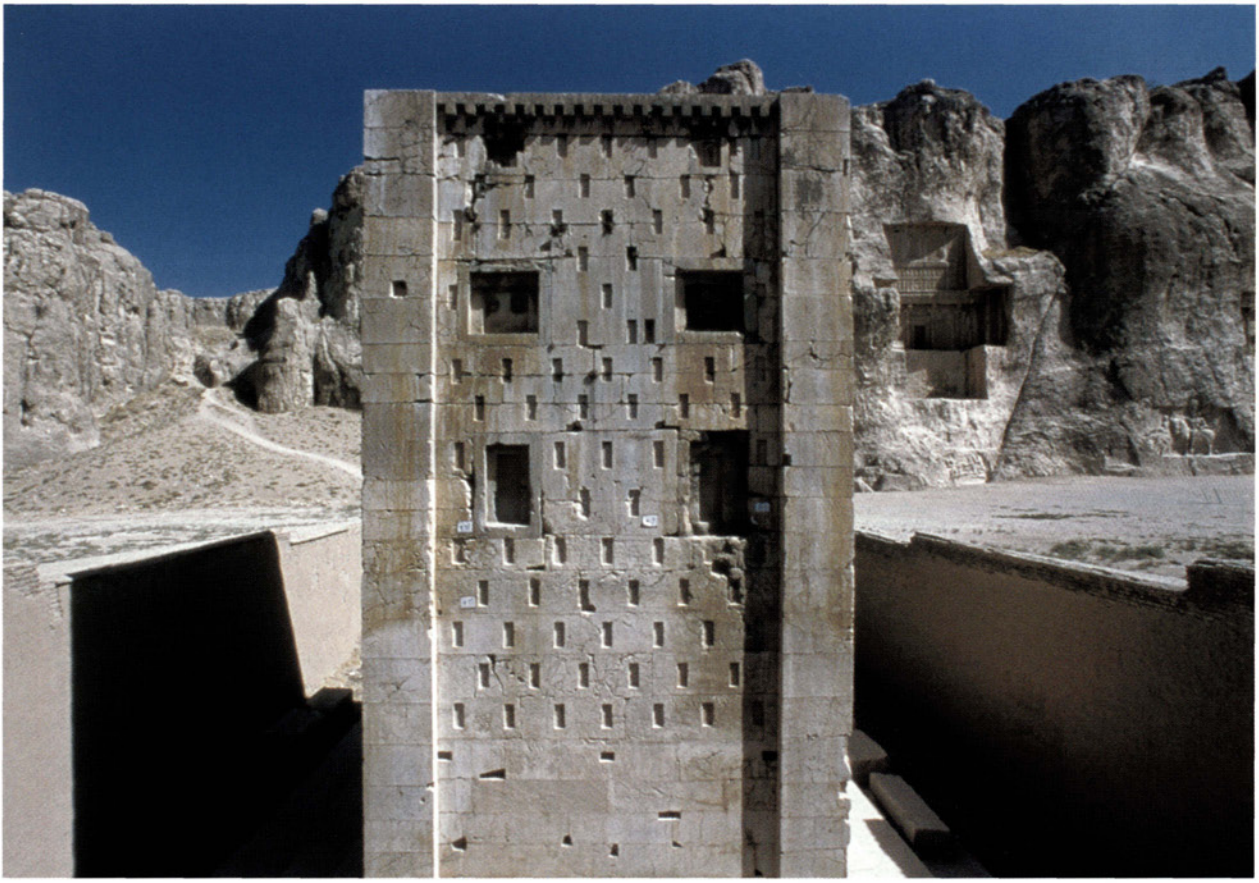
The battle of Issus

Alexander was aware that Darius' new army had journeyed from Babylon to Sochi in Syria. Alexander then arrived at the Cilician coastal plains and soon reached the Syrian Gates (Pillar of Jonah – south of Iskenderun). Darius entered Cilicia and reached Issus (near modern Iskenderun, Turkey). Alexander assumed that Darius would emerge from the narrow Belen Pass, and planned to attack him there while his large army was still reorganizing. By marching north from Sochi, however, and going around the Amanus Mountains, Darius avoided Alexander's trap and positioned himself to the rear of Alexander's forces. Darius' deployment posed a serious threat to Alexander's supply lines and communications. An additional concern was Darius linking up with the formidable Achaemenid fleet at the Gulf of Issus. This would then give Darius the option of landing troops anywhere along the Gulf of Issus. Alexander had no choice but to go to Issus where Darius was waiting. They clashed on October 1, 333 BC.

Darius placed the Greek mercenaries in the center, supported by the Karadakes (estimates vary from 20,000–60,000) to the mercenaries' left. The Karadakes appear to have been an Achaemenid close-quarter combat unit, developed to counter Greek heavy infantry. The Amanus Mountains forced the Karadakes to deploy in an "L" formation, with the lower portion across the dry Pinaris riverbed. Darius took his place in the center of his army. The Achaemenid cavalry stood on the right flank near the shore. A large segment of infantry and archers remained behind the heavy infantry and cavalry.

Darius' first action was to dispatch a light infantry force into the Amanus Mountains. However, Alexander neutralized these quickly. The battle opened with an intense Achaemenid archery barrage.[24] Alexander responded by charging with his Companion cavalry into Darius' left wing, towards the brave but inexperienced Karadakes. Elements of the Iranian cavalry must have intervened, but these proved unable to halt Alexander's attack. The efforts of the archers to support the Karadakes were also ineffectual.

The phalanx formations in the Hellenic center were supported by hoplites to their left and hypaspists to their right. However, the phalanx and supporting infantry struggled to maintain contact with Alexander and his cavalry, and despite their best efforts a gap opened. This was exploited by Darius' heavy infantry, who inflicted the heaviest losses against Alexander. Nevertheless, the phalanxes held their ground. Parmenion and the Thessalian



The cube of Zoroaster at Naghsh-e-Rustam, five miles (8km) from Persepolis. There was an almost identical monument, called the Zendan, at Pasargadae. Behind the cube are the tombs of Darius II (obscured by the cube), Artaxerxes I to the right, and further to the right, Darius the Great. The tomb of Xerxes is out of shot. Later Sassanian reliefs can be seen along the base of the cliff. (akg-images/ Gérard Degeorge) heavy cavalry also held Alexander's left flank against Darius' cavalry. Alexander's attack against Darius' left flank had to be supported by slingers and javeliners. After tenacious resistance, the left flank was finally crushed, allowing Alexander to wheel left and slice into Darius' heavy infantry in the center. This effectively destroyed the cohesion of the Achaemenid army. Alexander and his cavalry now spotted Darius in his golden chariot, and moved towards him. As Alexander and his cavalry came closer to the chariot, however, Darius' brother Oxyathres led a number of the royal cavalry to prevent the King's capture. Oxyathres slew a number of the Macedonian troops in this engagement,[25] but was unable to prevent their advance. Darius dismounted from his chariot and fled the field by horse. Achaemenid losses are generally reported as 100,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry killed,[26] with Macedonian losses standing at 130 infantry and 300 cavalry.[27] Oxyathres later became an honored member of Alexander's entourage.

Darius lost much more than just the battle at Issus. Issus broke the back of Achaemenid power over those lands outside of Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, and the Iranian plateau. Many irreplaceable commanders had been killed. The Achaemenid position in the rest of Anatolia, Syria, and by implication, Egypt, was doomed. Damascus, along with its treasury, fell to Alexander. The Phoenician coast and Syria were now conquered, although the city of Tyre resisted bitterly for seven months before being subdued. Tyre was of strategic importance as it was a major Phoenician center that had provided the Achaemenid Empire's main naval force. Gaza and Egypt also fell to Alexander, with the Egyptians hailing him as a liberator. But perhaps the most humiliating outcome of Issus for Darius was the capture of his wife, mother, and much of his entourage by Alexander, who treated them with honor.

Before Darius fought his last battle, he attempted to sue for peace, acknowledging Alexander's hegemony over all lands west of the Halys River.[28] Alexander's rejection of this offer led Darius to offer all lands west of the Euphrates, 30,000 silver talents, the hand of his daughter in marriage, and the position of the coregent of Darius.[29] These were again rejected, as Alexander endeavored to conquer the entire Achaemenid Empire and beyond.

The battle of Gaugamela

It took two years for Alexander to conquer Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. After conquering those regions Alexander moved from Phoenicia towards the Euphrates and Tigris, and into Mesopotamia, towards the heart of Persia. By this time the Empire had abandoned all hopes of retrieving Asia Minor. Darius' last stand would be made at the battle of Gaugamela in 331 BC.

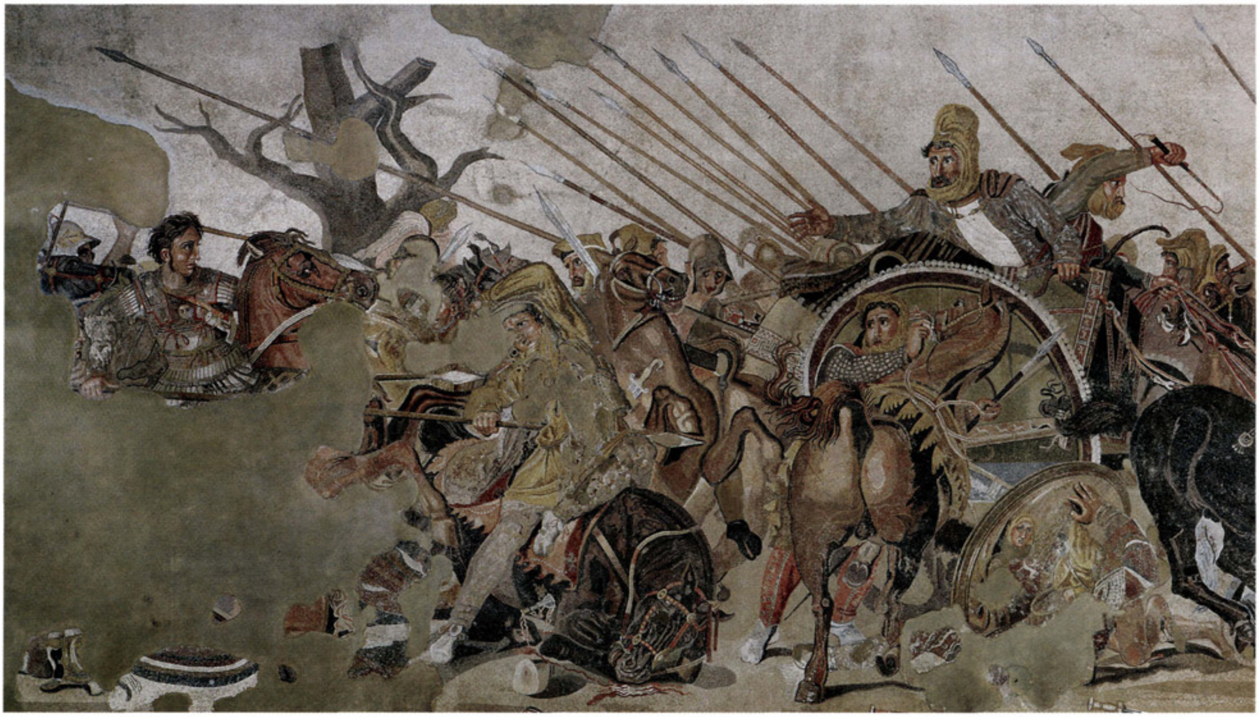
The Greek army was deployed into three sections: left, center, and right. Alexander took direct command of the right flank composed of his Companion cavalry, Macedonian units, and other Greek units. A group of cavalry was stationed in front of Alexander's archers who stood next to the phalanx formation. The phalanx stood in two lines. Alexander was intent on repeating his formula of pinning down the Achaemenids while he delivered his masterstroke. The function of holding the Achaemenids in place was to be done by Parmenion's left flank and, of course, the phalanxes. The left flank was composed of Thracian, Thessalian, and Greek mercenary units. The center was occupied by the phalanx formations, and to their rear stood auxiliary phalanx units. The additional support troops included Cretan archers, Achaians, and Agrians.

The Achaemenids had worked hard to recover from the heavy defeats at Granicus and Issus. They had attempted to provide their troops with larger shields[30] and swords with longer blades.[31] To counteract Alexander's tactical and military superiority, Darius had introduced scythed chariots into his army, a rather outdated technology. Nevertheless, the main objective was to have these operate in a battle breakthrough concept with the heavy cavalry. Perhaps there was an attempt at applying an "armored fist" doctrine on the battlefield. The scythed chariots would be launched straight into the enemy formations, followed by armored cavalry, who would punch into the gaps created by the chariots. In practice, the battlefield effectiveness of the scythed chariots proved minimal against the well-drilled and disciplined troops of Alexander, who had fought chariots before in Thracia. In that campaign, Alexander had ordered his men to lie down and lock their shields together as soon as the Thracian chariots came near their lines. This resulted in the Thracian vehicles harmlessly rolling over them; the vehicles were then neutralized by Alexander's archers. Against Darius' scythed chariots Alexander ordered his troops to simply open gaps along the vehicles' path of advance. The chariots would pass through harmlessly, whilst being vulnerable themselves to lances and archery. Darius also introduced 50 elephants to his battleline, although these do not appear to have seen much fighting.

As at Issus, Darius placed himself in the center with his best infantry. To his right stood the royal cavalry, Medo-Mardian archers, the immortal elite guards, Greek mercenary troops, and Carian and Indian cavalry. One of Darius' generals, Mazaeus, commanded the right flank, composed of Iranian (Parthian, Mede, Hyrcanian, Saka), Cappadocian, Armenian, Syrian, Mesopotamian, Tapurian (from northern Persia), Albanian, and Sacasenian (a form of Saka) cavalry. Many of the Sakas were under Achaemenid rule, but had come to fight for Darius as allies of the Empire.[32] Massagetaean cavalry were also present.[33] The left flank was commanded by Bessus, who led an impressive array of eastern Iranian cavalry, notably the Saka (Dahae), Parthians, Arachrosians, and Bactrians. Bessus' cavalry from the Iranian plateau and the Zagros Mountains were Persian, Susian, and Cadusian. Bessus' Albanians and Sacasenians were to flank Alexander's left while Mazaeus' Armenians and Cappadocians were stationed to the front and these spearheaded the attack. The scythed chariots were stationed in front of Darius with the others concentrated in front of the left and right flanks respectively.

Darius chose his battlefield near modern day Irbil (Arbela) in Iraqi Kurdistan, at a site known as Gaugamela. Engineers cleared the ground to ensure full mobility for the chariots and cavalry. The Achaemenids were preparing for a battle of flanking movements and maneuver. The numbers of Darius' army are quoted by Arrian at a fantastic total of one million infantry and 400,000 cavalry, while Plutarch reports the total number of Achaemenids at one million men.[34] Pirnia has suggested Quintus Curtius' numbers as the most accurate at 200,000 infantry, and cavalry at 45,000 men.[35] Considering Pirnia's assessment, the Achaemenid army still outnumbered the Greeks by a proportion of at least 5–6 to 1. The proportional differences in numbers resulted in a general sense of panic among the Macedonian troops, which Alexander calmed with his personal charisma and leadership.[36]

Alexander was well aware that Darius' forces could outflank his smaller army. In a testament to his genius, he planned to use that disadvantage to his advantage. His army moved slowly forward in a line at 45 degrees to "entice" Darius' cavalry to attack. The



The Pompeii mosaic has immortalized the epic conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great. The chariot-borne Darius III has his right hand stretched out towards Alexander, who appears to be wielding a lance. Alexander's appearance contrasts with the generally accepted notion that he was flaxen-haired. The confusion regarding his complexion may partly derive from a misunderstanding of the Greek term *Xanthenein* roughly translated as "light auburn." (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

formation also shifted right as it advanced. If Darius took no action, the phalanx would move off the prepared battlefield, rendering the chariots useless. Darius did not wish to initiate the attack, but the movement of Alexander's formation left him with no choice; the scythed chariots were launched but their effects were negated. The cavalry, however, were not so easily defeated. Mazaeus put pressure on Parmenion who was now in danger of being overwhelmed. Bessus struck with all his might at Alexander's right flank. The cavalry attacks of Mazaeus and Bessus resulted in a gap opening near Darius' center. Alexander quickly moved to exploit this, and led a wedge-formation attack against the center, accompanied by the Companion cavalry. This attack was supported by the phalanx and elite brigades. The Immortal guards and Greek mercenaries fought valiantly but were annihilated, obliging Darius to withdraw or suffer capture. Alexander was taking a major risk by attacking the Achaemenid center, and knew that he had to act very quickly before his own flanks collapsed. He was faced with two choices: pursue and capture Darius and watch his left flank get annihilated, or rescue his left flank and allow Darius to flee. Mazaeus' pressure on Alexander's left flank had opened a dangerous gap between Parmenion and the Hellenic center. This breach was immediately exploited by the Persian and Indian heavy cavalry who punched through the gap, but instead of attacking Parmenion from his sides and rear, they charged towards Alexander's main camp, either in search of loot or to rescue Darius' captured relatives.

Parmenion's position was now desperate, but he managed to hold out just long enough for Alexander to return from Darius' collapsed center. Parmenion was rescued, and Mazaeus' cavalry now withdrew, with Thessalian and other Greek troops in pursuit, inflicting heavy casualties. Bessus also abandoned the battle. The Achaemenid center had now totally collapsed and Darius fled the field. His abandoned camp was captured and looted. Achaemenid losses are reported by Arrian as 300,000 killed, in comparison with 100 infantry and 1,000 cavalry from Alexander's forces; Diodorus reports 90,000 Achaemenid and 500 Macedonian dead.[37] Perhaps the greatest Achaemenid tactical error at Gaugamela was the failure of the Perso-Indian cavalry to exploit the breach between Parmenion and the center. Had these wheeled to their right, the outcome of the battle might have been very different. At the very least, Mazaeus' attack would have succeeded in destroying Parmenion, which would have resulted in the loss of a major portion of Alexander's army.

Alexander's victory opened the interior of Mesopotamia. After resting his army for one month in Arbela, Alexander marched towards Babylon. The city was a vast metropolis with a sophisticated agricultural system, which made it highly capable of resisting long-term sieges.[38] Babylon, however, offered no resistance to Alexander's troops. Much imperial wealth was captured and distributed among Alexander's troops, a major morale booster to men now increasingly weary of an arduous campaign so far from their homes. With the acquisition of Mesopotamia, Alexander was now ready to make his thrust into the Iranian heartland itself.

Rhyton with mythical leonine creature, Tehran Museum. (akg-images)

The end of the Achaemenid Empire

With the fall of Babylon, Alexander's army marched towards Iran's southwest, reaching Susa after a 20-day march. Western historiography is of the opinion that the city's inhabitants offered no resistance and simply opened their gates to Alexander's army. Iranian archeological excavations since 1982 led by Mir Abedin Kaboli have unearthed 160 artillery stones and the remains of 400 arrows at Susa, challenging the official "no resistance" theory. Kaboli noted that:

> the good condition of Apadana Palace … unearthed during … excavations in Susa, indicated that Alexander could not get hold of the throne. The glory of the throne has prevailed and even tile decorations are untouched…[39]

One possibility, however, is that the city did fall to Alexander as narrated by Classical sources, but only after having overcome resistance. Perhaps Susa was spared destruction even as its vast stores of imperial wealth fell to Alexander. The Kaboli team's findings certainly warrant a reexamination of the historical narratives regarding the fall of Susa.

Ariobarzan's last stand at the Persian Gates

Alexander had the option of reaching Persepolis by the royal road from Susa, or by marching through the Zagros in Persis. Speck, Koch, and Pirnia have provided a thorough analysis of this phase of Alexander's conquests.[40] The Pasitigris River was crossed near Shushtar, after which some resistance was encountered. Alexander soon reached modern Haftgil where he decided to divide his forces. Parmenion would march to Persepolis along the royal road, with Alexander selecting the more treacherous route across the Zagros Mountains. After encountering some resistance from the Uxian tribe, Alexander ruthlessly massacred them, after which he encountered no more tribal resistance. After crossing the Marun River dividing Elam and Persis, Alexander was now obliged to march his forces through the Persian Gates, a rocky mountain pass in modern Yasuj, most likely the Geeloye range, in January 330 BC. General Ariobarzan was aware of Alexander's movement and had deployed to the mountain with 25,000 men.[41] Ariobarzan built a wall across the narrow pass, in order to ambush Alexander.

Alexander's column entered through the Persian Gates and marched along the narrow gully. As soon as they witnessed Ariobarzan's wall, the deadly trap was sprung. Boulders and missiles rained down on the column. Some Greeks did attempt to escape up the sides of the gully but were thwarted by the slippery ice and snow and the continuing barrage of missiles. Hellenic attempts at overlapping shields for protection failed, as the large boulders rolling down the mountain slopes simply crushed them.[42] Alexander had no option but to retire in haste; the dead were simply abandoned. However, Ariobarzan's wall, though formidable, was static. Alexander found a way around the pass, and one of his commanders, Philotas, then surprised the encamped Persians in the mountain passes while Alexander thrust into Ariobarzan's headquarters. Ariobarzan's forces were totally destroyed. In this final chapter of organized Achaemenid resistance, Iranian legends recall the exploits of female warrior Youtab, Ariobarzan's sister, who fought ferociously before falling in battle. Hand-to-hand fighting was fierce, and even unarmed tribal refugees joined the fight against Alexander. Ariobarzan escaped towards Persepolis to organize his last stand there. Alexander, however, had already sent his troops in pursuit of the general. Ariobarzan and his surviving companions were soon trapped but rather than surrender, they charged straight into the Macedonian lines.[43] One account states that Ariobarzan was killed in the last charge while another version reports that he escaped to the north where he finally surrendered to Alexander with his brothers.[44]

Although precise figures are unavailable, historians generally agree that this engagement cost Alexander his greatest losses. Classical sources do corroborate that Alexander suffered heavy casualties at the Persian Gates, but provide no statistics. According to Diodorus, Alexander's greatest losses occurred during his first thrust into the Persian Gates. In commemoration of the general's exploits, the Persian Gates are known today by the locals as the Tang-e-Ariobarzan (Valley of Ariobarzan).

The destruction of Persepolis

The defeat of Ariobarzan's force at the Persian Gates removed the last military obstacle between Alexander and Persepolis. Before his formal entrance into the city, Alexander roused his men with the following speech:

> Greece has never had an enemy worse than the kings of the capital of Persia … it is from here where Darius and Xerxes bought a sacrilegious war to Europe … by destroying this city we shall satisfy the spirits of our ancestors.[45]

Roused by this speech, and recalling Xerxes' devastation upon Greece, Alexander's Companion cavalry and phalanx-men entered the city in April 330 BC.

Alexander's harsh treatment of Persepolis has been duly recorded by Diodorus.[46] Thousands of pack animals from Babylon and Susa (including 3,000 pack camels) were bought to transport more than 2,500 tons of gold. This wealth had been a type of "federal reserve" for the Empire, accumulated since the days of Cyrus the Great. The houses and palaces were raided and all of the women, including noblewomen, were simply carried off as slaves. A large number of prisoners were simply slaughtered.[47] In sheer scale, the sack of the city would only be matched centuries later when the Arabs captured Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanian Empire, in AD 638. Tradition has it that in a final indignity for the once-mighty city of the fallen Empire, Alexander and his men were roused by a Greek courtesan to burn down the palace in a drunken stupor.[48] Persepolis was so utterly destroyed that even the later Parthian and Sassanian empires never rebuilt it. Only the ruined columns and walls of this giant city remain to bear silent testimony to its glorious past and ignominious fall.

Despite his treatment of Persepolis, Alexander's admiration and respect for Cyrus the Great, whom he regarded as a personal hero, was well-documented. He had always intended to visit the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargardae. Arrian narrates that Alexander was distressed to learn that Cyrus' tomb had been robbed and his remains damaged.[49] Alexander ordered Cyrus' tomb and coffin to be restored, the contents placed inside, and the entrance sealed. Alexander also spared the frontier post of Kurtakh, originally founded by Cyrus; the city was known to the Greeks as Cyropolis.[50]

The death of Darius III

After the destruction of Persepolis, Alexander had one last symbol of Achaemenid authority to destroy: Darius III. After Gaugamela, Darius III had retreated to the ancient Median

OPPOSITE This 16th-century Persian *Shahname* depicts the victorious Alexander cradling the head of Darius III as he lies dying. Interestingly, the Islamic-era *Shahname* epic has Darius and Alexander as half-brothers. (The Art Archive/The Bodleian Library, Oxford Elliott 340 folio 32r)

capital of Ecbatana. From here the King issued a formal call for reinforcements who never arrived. Alexander, who had been informed that the Saka and Cadusians had remained loyal to Darius, moved his army into Media, but discovered that Darius had already left.[51] Once in Ecbatana, Alexander ordered Parmenion to gather as much of the city's treasures as possible. The modern city of Hamadan still maintains the *Shir-e-Sangi* (Lion of Stone)[52] commissioned by Alexander in honor of his close friend Hephastion.

Darius was moving to the northeast in a bid to recruit troops. He linked up with Bessus, his commander at Gaugamela and satrap of Bactria. As Alexander engaged in pursuit, a number of Darius' former troops defected to him at Rhagae (Rayy). After a five-day rest at Rhagae, Alexander pushed further into the northeast, but as he approached the remnants of Darius' forces, Bessus assassinated the King. Iranian and some Classical accounts vary as to whether Darius managed to speak to Alexander as he lay dying. Quintus Curtius narrates that Darius had already died before Alexander reached him, while Diodorus states that Darius was still alive.[53] According to Iranian legends, the dying Darius made these requests of Alexander: not to appoint non-Iranians to rule Iranians and to bring his murderer to justice. Bessus, the murderer of Darius, was caught and executed. Other accounts have Bessus fleeing to Bactria where he claimed the title of Artaxerxes IV. In this version, Alexander captures Bessus and has him executed by hanging in Ecbatana. If true, then it is possible that Bessus was attempting to reconstitute the remnants of Achaemenid resistance and recruit fresh north Iranian cavalry.

The world vision of Alexander: unity of Aryans and Greeks

Alexander had a remarkable vision for the future of his new conquest: he wished to create unity between the Iranians and the Greeks, a fusing of Persia and Greece with him as emperor.[54] He encouraged intermarriages between his Macedonian officers and Iranian noblewomen in Susa.[55] Persians were given Macedonian military commands, and many Iranian contingents received the status of "Companions" of Alexander, equal to Alexander's Macedonian "Companions," which led to great resentment among the Macedonians.[56] It is possible that the cooperation of the Persians was sought to help him rule the Empire.[57] Apparently, there was a policy in place to have Iranian satraps "rule" alongside Greco-Macedonian troops. Young Iranian troops received Greek military training and were taught Greek tactics.[58] It is recorded that Alexander prayed for *Homonoia* (Harmony) at a banquet, as Greeks and Iranians drank from the same cup. Alexander reputedly rewarded Peucestas (Macedonian satrap of Persis) for having learnt Persian and publicly wearing Iranian dress.[59] By the end of his life, however, Alexander was becoming increasingly suspicious of the loyalty of his Iranian garrisons and issued an order for them to disband by early 324.[60]

Despite his vision of union, Alexander struck a great blow against the Aryan priesthood, notably the magi. Zoroastrian sources cite Alexander as "the great destroyer" in his killing of the magi, and the burning of the original *Avesta* texts of the early Aryans.[61] Alexander is cited by Zoroastrian tradition as having "killed the magi … many teachers, lawyers, Herbats [the lower magi], Mobads [the upper magi]."[62] Much of the literature of Persia, notably works of learning and Zoroastrian texts, simply perished during the Alexandrian conquests.[63] There were three versions of the original sayings of Zoroaster, in Susa, Persepolis, and Maracanda (modern Samarkand). Today, only portions of the original *Avesta* texts have survived; the term

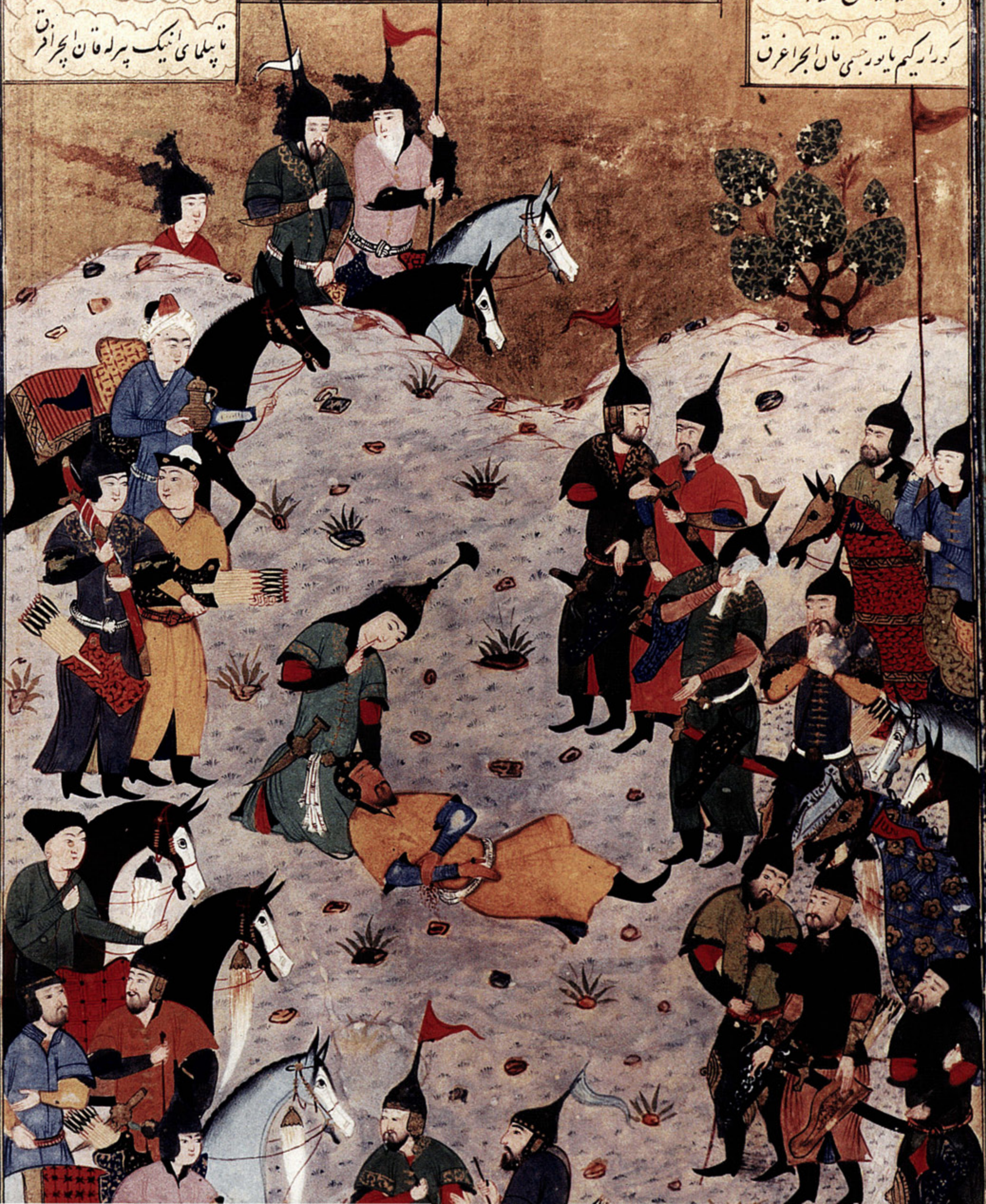
تا نی بیله عزم ایتیب اول طرف
که بولمای پریشان سپاهیغه صف

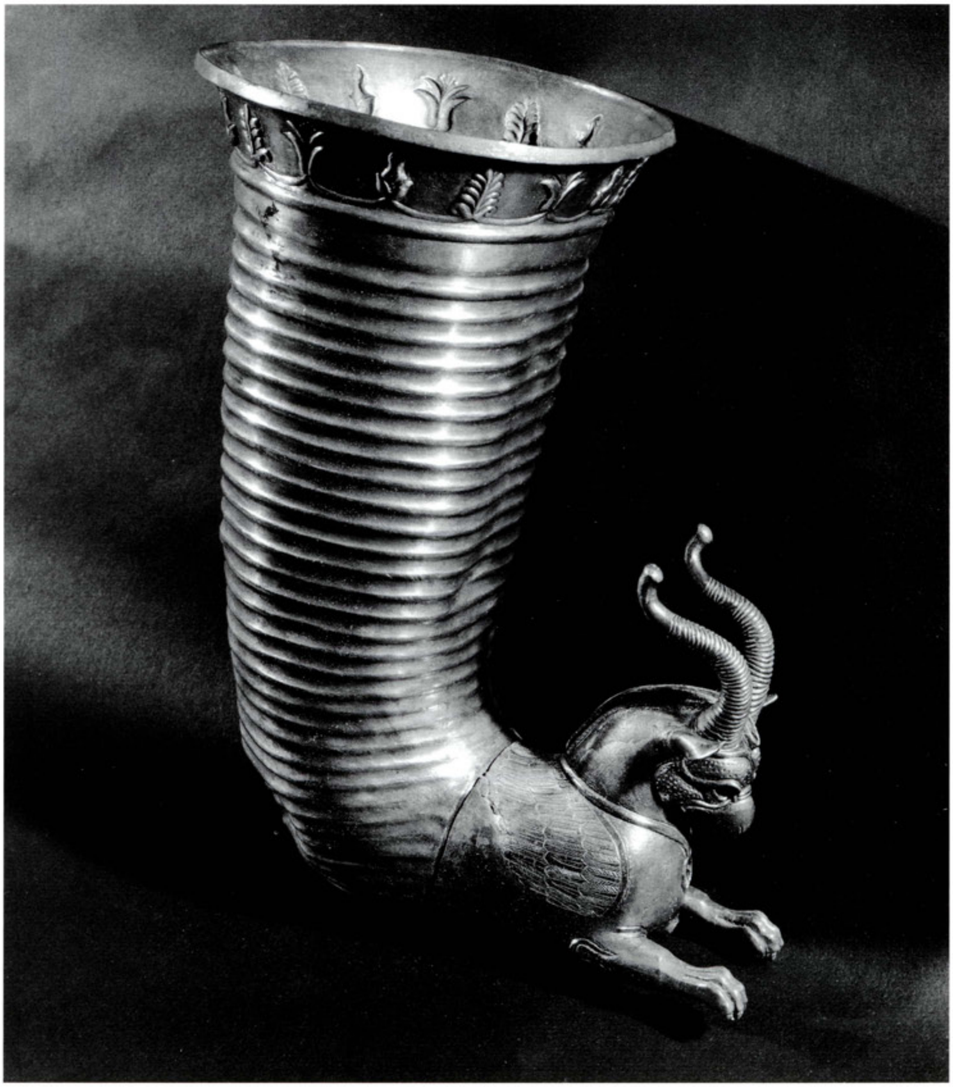
ییتیشتی جو اول خیلی نینک قاشیغه
که جمع ایردیلار شاه نینک باشیغه

سکندر ییتیشکاچ قوییب یرگا باش
انگا قیلدیلار شاه حالینی فاش

سکندر توشوب کیلدی دارا ساری
ایشی توشتی زرق و مدارا ساری

کورار کیم یاتور جسمی قان ایچرا غرق
تاپیلمای انینک بیرله قان ایچرا فرق





Achaemenid silver rhyton, found at Erzincan, modern Turkey. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

Zend-Avesta is literally translated as "the burnt Avesta," in reference to the Alexandrian invasions. The extent of destruction wrought by Alexander has been questioned, as the Frataraka temple at Persepolis was built after rather than before the invasion.[64] Zoroastrian sources may have exaggerated the extent of the destruction wrought by Alexander, but this does not deny the fact that the magi and Zoroastrianism suffered at his hands. In his actions, Alexander may have been seeking retribution for Xerxes' burning and destruction of the sacred temples of Greece, or he may have been safeguarding his position against the magi and the Aryan priesthood whom he saw as a potential danger to the authority of Hellenic rule in Persia. The magi and their texts would always have the potential to rouse the Iranian populace against foreign domination. Zoroastrianism, however, did survive the Alexandrian conquests and the succeeding Seleucids.

Alexander's vision of unity was never realized, irrespective of its bombastic ceremonial beginnings. Prior to his campaign into Arabia, Alexander contracted a fatal fever after having drunk from a cup at a private gathering with his friend Medius of Larisa in Babylon. Much of modern historiography is of the opinion that Alexander died of this "fever" on June 7, 323 BC, yet there is a theory that he was poisoned for becoming "too Aryan." There is certainly Classical verification of Alexander having "gone native" with his adoption of the upright tiara, an Iranian symbol of imperial authority, and his wearing of "barbarian" Iranian dress.[65] Alexander also attempted to institute the Achaemenid custom of having persons prostrate themselves before him as king. This may also be related to Alexander's belief in his own divinity.[66]

Subsequent events provide strong evidence that the Macedonians rejected Alexander's vision of unity. After his death, the Macedonians divorced their Iranian wives, and Cassander murdered Alexander's widow Roxanna and her son Alexander by 310 BC.[67] The Iranian satraps were also removed. Not only were the Macedonians loathe to unite with the Aryans of Persia, they also failed to maintain unity amongst themselves. Alexander's sudden death led to war amongst his generals, as no successor had been named. The great empire of Alexander was soon to be replaced by a number of Hellenic successor states, notably the Seleucids of Persia.

Part 2

The Parthians

The Parthians restored the independence of Persia from the post-Alexandrian Seleucid kings. Their evolution of equestrian-based warfare was crystallized in the "all-cavalry" doctrine of heavily armored lancers acting with nimble, deadly horse archers. Armed with these weapons, the Parthians kept the ambitious Roman Empire at bay, and their reign witnessed the rise of the world's first true "feudal" society as well as a revival of Iranian culture, arts and architecture.

Chapter 7

The Seleucids and the rise of the Parthians

The Diadochic Wars: Alexander's successors at war

The Seleucids were the direct successors of Alexander in Persia. Almost immediately after the death of Alexander, the *Diadochoi* (lit. successors) began to battle over Alexander's conquered territory. The overall outcome of these wars was the division of Alexander's former domains: Ptolemy I (367–283 BC) obtained Egypt, the Palestine-Phoenician coasts, the island of Cyprus as well as Cilicia in southwest Anatolia. Cassander ruled the Hellenic world from Macedonia in the north down to and including Sparta in the south. A large enclave of western Greece was ruled by Epirus. Lysimachus became master of Thrace and western Asia Minor and the entire rim of the Black Sea coast. Seleucus Nicator (r. 312–281 BC) appropriated Mesopotamia, Media, the Iranian plateau, eastern and northeastern Iran (mostly in Media), modern Afghanistan, parts of eastern Anatolia, Syria, and Central Asia (excluding Chorasmia and the Dahae federation).

After the fall of Susa, Alexander had assigned Seleucus to organize the nobles of the Iranian cavalry, whom he assembled in units of 10,000 men.[1] Seleucus formally established his rule of Iran in Babylon. He established his capital in 305 BC on the west bank of the Tigris, which became known as Seleucia or "Seleucia on the Tigris." Across from Seleucia stood the Babylonian town of Opis, later renamed Ctesiphon by the Parthians. After the battle of Ipsos in 301, when Seleucus obtained Syria and eastern Anatolia, a second Seleucid capital appeared known as Antioch on the Orontes in ancient northern Syria. Ecbatana served as the summer residence of the Seleucids. Meanwhile, Greek colonists continued to arrive and settle across the realms of the former Achaemenid Empire in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran until the early 250s BC.

Some Iranian scholars view the Seleucids as tangential and largely irrelevant to the history of Iran,[2] while Western classicists sometimes claim the reverse. The latter position fails to acknowledge the fact that Hellenic authority never managed to penetrate into the interior or tribal regions of Persia. As noted by Frye, "the Seleucids controlled the main trade routes in Iran but little else."[3] However, Hellenic rule was far from "irrelevant" to the political, military, and cultural development of Iran. This chapter discusses those post-Alexandrian and Seleucid events of direct relevance to developments in Persia up to the secession of Parthia.

PREVIOUS PAGE

LEFT The temple at Hatra. The city boasted formidable defenses and was never conquered by the Romans, withstanding the forces of Trajan in AD 116, and of Septimius Severus in AD 198. (akg-images/ Gérard Degeorge)

RIGHT Gold Parthian clasp inlaid with turquoise depicting a eagle grasping its prey, Luristan, Iran, 1st century BC–1st century AD. (© The British Museum/ HIP/Topfoto)

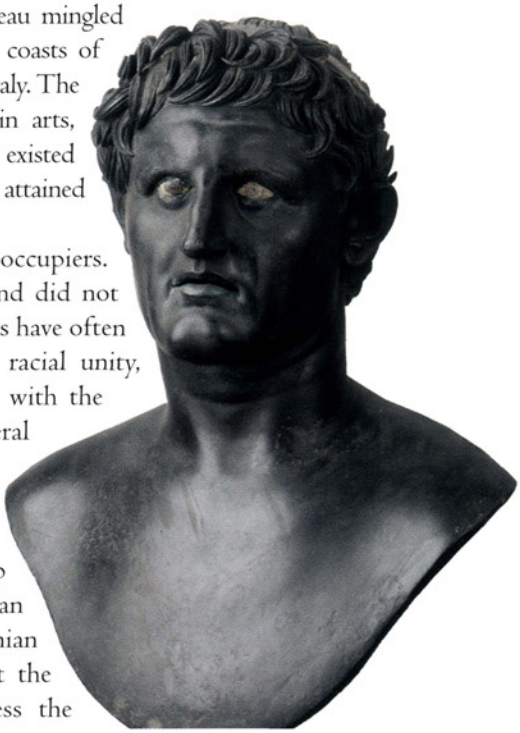
Seleucid weaknesses in Persia

The Seleucid rulers who followed Seleucus Nicator never managed to establish a loyal political base among their Iranian subjects, nor a strong centralized governing system. Their weaknesses, in conjunction with Parthian military action, led to the demise of Greek rule in Persia.

The former Achaemenid Empire was a gigantic realm, even with the exclusion of Asia Minor, the Near East, and Egypt. As essentially an occupation force, the Seleucids simply did not have sufficient Greco-Macedonian troops[4] to fully enforce their authority across the vast territories of eastern Iran and parts of Central Asia, the Iranian plateau, northern Persia, Media and Media Atropatene, and Mesopotamia. The use of Iranian units was limited to auxiliary roles as they could prove unreliable. In the west, Seleucid authority across Iran was undermined by continued confrontation with the "successors" in Egypt and western Anatolia. While rebellions and breakaway movements could be crushed by the garrisons within the Seleucid kingdom, this capability became diminished with ever-increasing military distractions to the Seleucid west. The problem became more pronounced with the early expansions of Rome across the Aegean, even as Antiochus III managed to temporarily check the now-independent Parthians of northeast Iran from overrunning Persia by 209 BC. The ongoing political and military focus westward (beyond Antioch), however, diverted the Seleucids from the rise of breakaway movements in Central Asia and northeast Iran.

The Greek colonists were basically Hellenic islands in a vast Iranian realm. The Aryan feudal lords remained intact and firmly entrenched across the former Achaemenid Empire. With the possible exception of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, the Greco-Macedonian colonists made very little effort at assimilating their Hellenicism with the Aryan culture of Iran. This is interesting, as Greeks and Iranian peoples outside of the Iranian plateau mingled and integrated in places such as Cappadocia, Commagene, the Pontic coasts of Anatolia, the northern rim of the Black Sea, and Calabria in southern Italy. The Greco-Iranian syntheses in these places resulted in powerful strides in arts, architecture, culture, and technology; while Hellenic influences certainly existed within the Iranian plateau, the level and intensity of these activities never attained those achieved outside of Greece and Iran.

The Iranian population viewed the Hellenic colonists as alien occupiers. The Seleucids were a post-Alexandrian occupation force in Iran and did not represent the Iranians whom they now ruled by force. While historians have often discussed the benefits of Hellenicism and Alexander's vision of racial unity, not much evidence exists of the Seleucids having been concerned with the promotion of Iranian culture, or even the welfare of its general population. It is also possible that the Seleucids applied discriminatory practices in the provision of food supplies.[5] At times, discontent could break out into armed rebellion, for example the armed rebellion by 3,000 warriors who were lured by Satrap Selies into a trap at Randa and massacred by Seleucid Macedonian and Thracian troops.[6] There was also disloyalty among the Iranian contingents in the Seleucid army, especially during battles against the Parthians. While the Seleucids were temporarily able to suppress the



Seleucus I Nicator. (akg-images/Andrea Baguzzi)

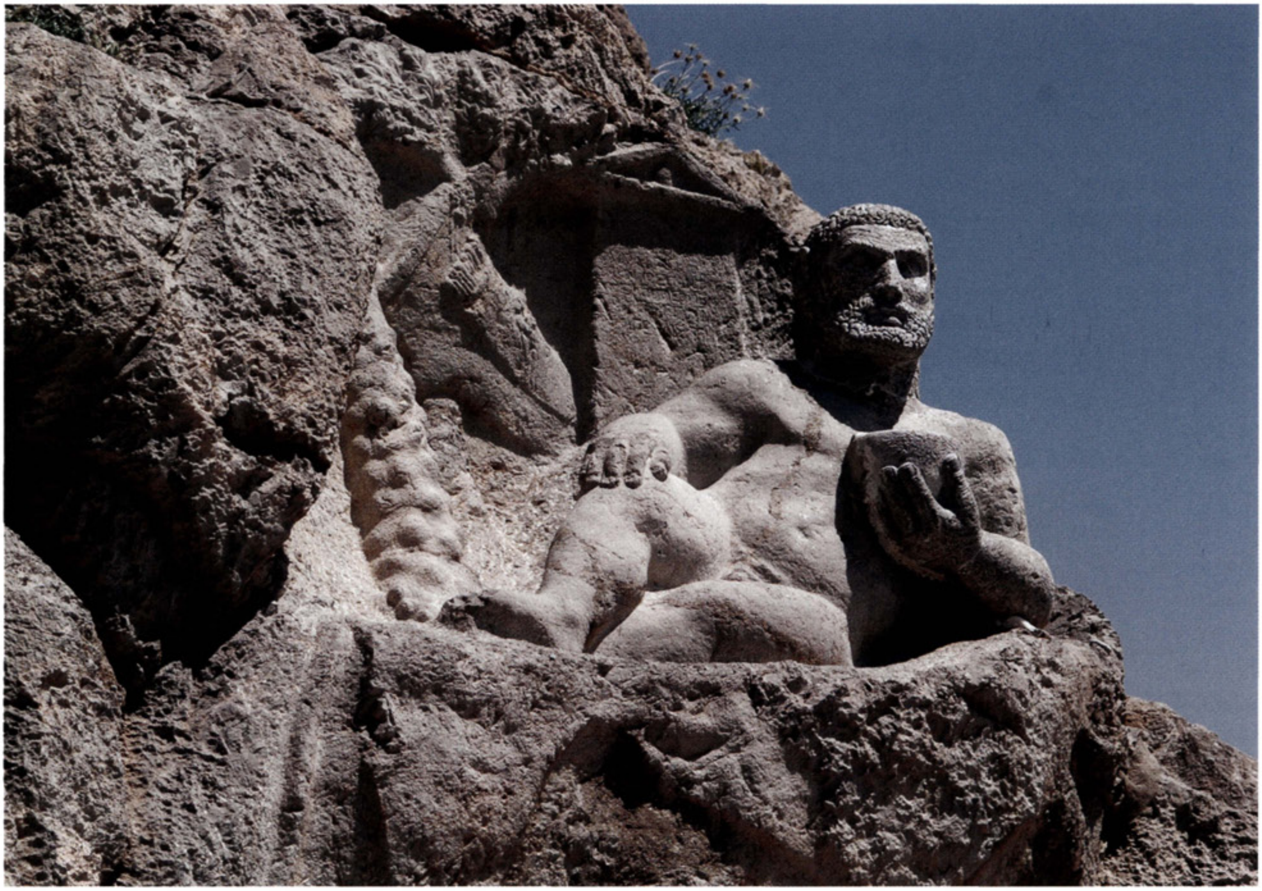
Iranian population, they were ultimately unable to suppress their political resurgence as expressed by the succeeding Parthian dynasty.

The Hellenic interlude in eastern Persia lasted less than a century after the Alexandrian conquests. Seleucus was unable to prevent the secession of southern Afghanistan (ancient Harahuvati) and Baluchistan (ancient Gedrosia) by the early 280s BC. The most dangerous development, however, was the secession of Parthia by 238 BC, a region with strong military, cultural, and technological links to the Saka of Central Asia.

The spread of Hellenicism

There has been much speculation on the question of Hellenic influence upon the Iranian population. Hellenic arts certainly influenced early Parthian arts after the collapse of Seleucid authority in Iran. The notion of a Greek "influence" upon Persian mythology is misinformed as (excepting the nomenclature) both derived their pantheon and linguistics from the same (Kurgan) Indo-European base. Traces of the specifically Hellenic pantheon certainly survive, such as the rock statue of Hercules at Behistun.

It was the Greek language that had the most pervasive presence in Iran and Central Asia during Seleucid rule. The Greek language had already spread widely in western



The statue of Heracles at Behistun is probably the most vivid piece of Seleucid art in Iran, and serves as a trace of the Hellenic pantheon within the Seleucid Empire. (© Livius.org)

Anatolia by late Achaemenid times and, following Alexander's conquests, was to spread as far as India and Central Asia, a situation with parallels to the later Arab conquerors of Islam.[7] Many of the Aryan nobles learnt to speak in Greek and the later Parthian rulers of Iran were well informed of Greek culture and language. The Greeks, however, do not seem to have put much effort in learning Persian. Although some classical historians and their contemporary advocates have exaggerated the extent of city-building by Alexander,[8] dramatic examples of the Greek *polis* (city) system did appear in places such as Seleucia on the Tigris or Ay Khanum in Central Asia. These cities featured theaters, civic bodies, and gymnasia,[9] just like those in Greece. Civilians, artisans, craftsmen, and all types of professionals populated these cities alongside military professionals.[10] The polis, however, had virtually no impact on the nomadic and peasant populations of Iran, much like the later Arab invaders whose main influence was in the urban centers they settled. The cities of importance were those that connected the Iranian plateau to central Asia, namely Ecbatana, and Rhagae, onto Merv in Central Asia and modern Afghanistan. Susa in southwest Iran led to the Persian Gulf and towards India to the east.

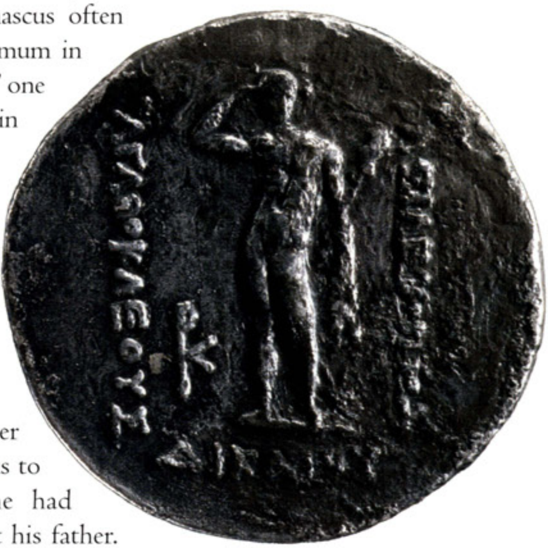
Hellenicism never penetrated the core of the Iranian psyche, as the Greeks never forced the population towards Hellenicism, or Greek political systems, and did not attempt to disrupt the Aryan cults of Iran.[11] The Aryan heritage of the Iranian peoples also proved highly resilient, eventually leading towards the full restoration of an Iranian national identity and culture, a process fully underway by the 1st century AD.

Antiochus I Soter and Antiochus II Theos

Antiochus I (r. 281–261 BC) was the embodiment of Alexander's vision of racial union between Greeks and Aryans. His mother was Apama, an Iranian noblewoman who had married Seleucus I. Thrace and Macedonia were apparently abandoned as Antiochus attempted to seek influence over the Iranian-ruled dynasties of Cappadocia and Bithynia in northwest Anatolia along the Black Sea. In the Near East, Syria was a major source of Seleucid–Ptolemaic conflicts, and important cities such as Damascus often changed masters. Antiochus made a determined bid against Pergamum in western Anatolia, but suffered defeat at Sardis in 261 BC. Antiochus' one notable success was against the rampaging Gauls whom he defeated in Anatolia in 278 BC, earning him the title Soter (lit. Savior).

Another important development took place in the southwest of Iran, in Persis. Although the timeframe is somewhat unclear, Persis was striking its own coins as early as the reign of Seleucus I,[12] and by the time of Antiochus I (or II or III) was paying only nominal allegiance to the Seleucids. Evidently the Seleucids were willing to grant autonomy as long as their authority over the Iranian plateau was not challenged.

Antiochus II (r. 261–246 BC) ascended the throne in 261 BC after the death of his father, following his Sardis defeat. The throne was to have passed to Antiochus' older son Seleucus; however, he had been put to death in 262 BC, allegedly for having revolted against his father.



By 250 BC, an independent Greco-Bactrian kingdom had been established. This silver tetradrachm was issued in the early 2nd century BC by Agathocles, a king of Bactria. To display the legitimacy of his rule, Agathocles put portraits of his illustrious predecessors on his coins, including Alexander the Great, Antiochus II, and Diodotus, the first king of Bactria. This tetradrachm shows Heracles holding a skin and lionskin, with the legend "of king Agathocles the Just" ranged on three sides. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

Like his predecessors, Antiochus II focused his attentions towards Thrace where he was given the name Theos (lit. God) by the Milesians. He also fought successfully against Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, scoring victories on the southern coastlines of Anatolia. When Seleucus II Callinicus Pogon (r. 246–225 BC) became king he was faced with a successful offensive by Ptolemy III of Egypt (r. 246–222 BC) in the late 240s BC. Seleucus II was pushed back to the Tigris, however, he did manage to reconquer Syria. These "western" operations prevented the Seleucids from making preparations to face dangerous developments further east along the northern rim of the Iranian plateau and Central Asia.

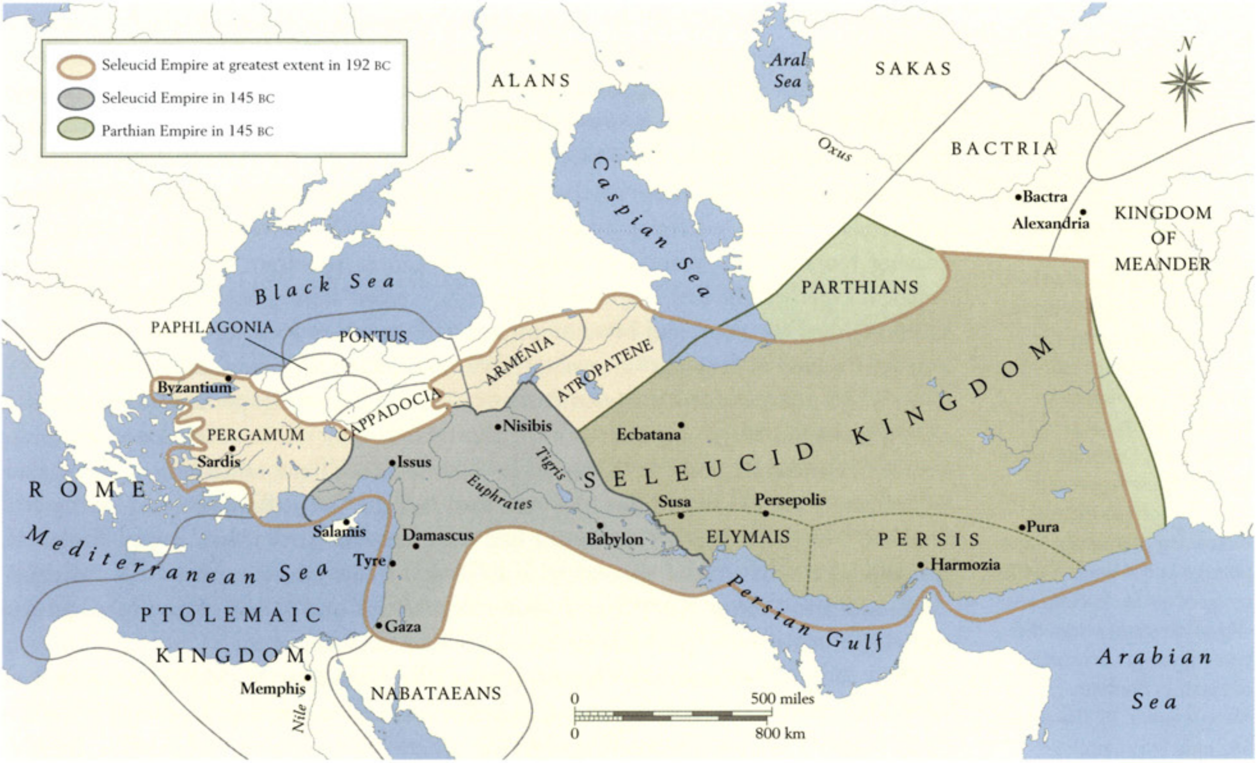
Soon after his conquests, Alexander had been faced with a militarily difficult revolt by the Bactrians and Soghdians.[13] This led to the placement of powerful garrisons to enforce Greek authority and to guard against the formidable Saka of Central Asia. The Greeks of Central Asia, however, were soon developing their own "separatist" tendencies. This was manifested during the rule of Antiochus II, who proved incapable of enforcing Seleucid authority over the Greeks in Central Asia. The Seleucid governor or satrap of Bactria, Diodotus, had made a successful bid for independence by 255 BC.[14] By 250 BC, Diodotus had established an independent Greco-Bactrian kingdom,[15] just as the province of Parthia was also seceding from the Seleucids. The Greco-Bactrian kingdom, based mainly in modern Afghanistan, lasted until 125 BC when it was overrun by Iranian Yueh-Chi peoples migrating from further east in Central Asia. King Demetrius (r. 200–180 BC) attacked the Indian subcontinent and established the Indo-Greek kingdom in 180 BC. This kingdom was crushed after nearly two centuries in 10 BC by the Saka, Kushans and Parthians.

The rise of the Parthians

By the time of the Achaemenids, a distinct province of Parthava is mentioned, with a capital at Tus.[16] This region was apparently joined to Hyrcania (modern day Gorgan in Northern Iran, directly below the Caspian Sea). Parthava may have later been separated and joined to Chorasmia in Central Asia. The Parthians supplied the Achaemenids with cavalry.[17] The satrapy of Parthava also sent contingents to fight against Alexander.

Scholars have often debated whether the Parthavans of the Achaemenid era are the same people as the Parthians who rose to challenge Rome. What is clear is that after the collapse of the Achaemenid Empire, Parthava, or Parthia, was ruled by the Seleucid dynasty. The region appears to have partly overlapped with present-day Khorassan in eastern Iran. It is generally agreed that the province of Parthia experienced arrivals from a subgroup of north Iranian Saka from Central Asia, known as the Aparni/Parni, the dominant tribe of the Dahae Confederation, who were led by Ashk (Arsaces). They were the ethnic kin of the north Iranian Saka and earlier Massagetae.[18] Parni migrants may have been arriving as early as the reign of Seleucus I. By 200 BC, the Parni had come to dominate a significant portion of those regions situated to the southeast of the Caspian Sea. The term "Parthian" now reflected an ethnic and political fusion between an eastern and a northern Iranian people. The cultural and political links between Parthia and the north Iranian Saka continued throughout the dynasty.[19]

The Seleucid Kingdom and Parthian Empire 145 BC


Seleucid Empire at greatest extent in 192 BC
Seleucid Empire in 145 BC
Parthian Empire in 145 BC
N
ALANS
Aral Sea
SAKAS
Oxus
BACTRIA
Bactra
Alexandria
KINGDOM OF MEANDER
Caspian Sea
PARTHIANS
Black Sea
PAPHLAGONIA
PONTUS
ARMENIA
ATROPATENE
Byzantium
CAPPADOCIA
PERGAMUM
Sardis
Nisibis
Issus
Tigris
Euphrates
Ecbatana
SELEUCID KINGDOM
ROME
Susa
Persepolis
Mediterranean Sea
Salamis
Damascus
Babylon
ELYMAIS
PERSIS
Pura
Tyre
Harmozia
PTOLEMAIC KINGDOM
Gaza
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
Memphis
Nile
NABATAEANS
0
500 miles
0
800 km

Parthia gains independence

Shortly after the breaking away of Greco-Bactria, Andragoras, the Seleucid satrap of Parthia, revolted against Seleucus II in 247–245 BC, just one year before the death of Seleucus' father, Antiochus II. Andragoras was slain by Ashk probably by 248 BC.[20] Classical accounts by Arrian and Syncellus offer further information, noting how Prefect Agathocles insulted Ashk.[21] Ashk and his brother Tirdad then conspired with five compatriots to overthrow Andragoras. The parallels with the story of Darius and his six conspirators raise questions as to the historical veracity of this account. Andragoras' rebellion was then "appropriated" by Ashk, transforming Andragoras' "separatist" rebellion into an "Iranian" secession movement. Ashk now controlled Parthia.

It is generally agreed that either before or during these chaotic events, north Iranian migrants or invaders from the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea began to arrive in Parthia. It seems that there was a large group of Saka of the Parni of the Dahae confederation of Abarshahr (Aparshahr).[22] This is verified in the Middle Iranian text *Bundahishn*.[23] Wolski has suggested the following sequence and chronology for Ashk's takeover of Parthia.[24] First, the Parni mount an initial "invasion" of Parthia by 280 BC. Ashk then leads the Parni to conquer Quchan (Astauene) by 250 BC; he is then crowned as King in the capital of Quchan in 247 BC. It is also generally agreed that by 241 BC, Tirdad (r. 247–211 BC), had absorbed the entire satrapy of Parthia, and that Ashk and Tirdad had crushed Andragoras, who died in 238 BC, resulting in the total elimination of Greek rule in Parthia.

As in Greco-Bactria, the Seleucids proved unable to prevent Parthia's secession from their empire. The battles of Seleucus II against Ptolemy III of Egypt had left him with few military resources to combat the breakaway movement in Parthia. Desperate to reassert Hellenic control over Parthia, Seleucus II launched a powerful offensive in 238 BC, perhaps in concert with Diodotus of Greco-Bactria.[25] Parthia, however, not only maintained her independence, but also entered Hyrcania by 235 BC. Diodotus II, son and successor of Diodotus I, reversed his father's policy of animosity against Parthia, and struck an alliance with Ashk.[26] These successes enabled Ashk to establish his capital at Hecatompylos. Having founded the Parthian dynasty, Ashk began to penetrate the Iranian plateau at Seleucid expense. The first Parthian metropolitan centers were soon established at Shahr-e Qumis (near Damghan) and Nysa or ancient Mithradatkert (now in Central Asia). These may have served as "capitals" at various times during the early period of the dynasty.

In 223 BC, Antiochus III Megas Basileus (Greek: Great King, perhaps in imitation of the Achaemenid kings) succeeded to the throne following the assassination of his older brother Seleucus III Soter (r. 225–223 BC). Antiochus III had inherited a battered state in disarray. Eastern Asia Minor had been lost, and the Greco-Bactrians and Parthia had seceded. Northern Persia (Hyrcania) had been annexed to Parthia, a very dangerous development that could encourage a new pan-Iranic unity against the Seleucids. Alexander and Molon, the Seleucid governors of Persis and Media respectively, had also revolted. Further west, Seleucid authority in Judea was being tested.

Antiochus III defeated the "native" revolts of Artabazanes of Media and Xerxes of Armenia.[27] With his western fronts secured, Antiochus III struck with his armies at Parthia in 209 BC.[28] The attack successfully penetrated into Hyrcania and captured the Parthian capital at Hecatompylos. By 206 BC, Ashk II[29] had acknowledged the authority of Antiochus III. For a brief period it seemed as if Hellenic authority in Parthia had been restored. A campaign was launched against Euthydemus of Bactria in 208 BC, who, after the defeat of his cavalry at Hari Rud (Arius River),[30] successfully resisted Antiochus III's attempts at storming the city of Bactria. Antiochus then acknowledged Bactrian independence two years later and gave the hand of his daughter in marriage to Euthydemus.[31]

In the meantime, Antiochus III had followed the policies of his predecessors in allowing Persis autonomy and demanding only nominal allegiance from them. Antiochus III perhaps realized that continuous rule with military force could not be maintained indefinitely with the resources at his disposal.[32]

The success against Parthia proved short-lived. Antiochus III was crushed by the Romans at Thermopylae in 191 BC and at Magnesia in Anatolia in 189 BC. The Romans then imposed the Peace of Apamea in 188 BC,

Parthian leaded bronze belt buckle, 3rd–2nd century BC. The horseman on this belt buckle has his hair arranged in a bunched style that is typical of Parthian art. Decorative buckles showing various subjects, such as couples embracing or animals, were popular at this time. A wide range of ornate buckles are shown on statues from the contemporary caravan city of Hatra in northern Mesopotamia. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto) forcing Antiochus to abandon all Seleucid territories north of the Taurus and surrender his battle elephants and navy. In addition, Antiochus was to annually pay 15,000 talents to the Romans. These financial burdens now obliged Antiochus III to launch an attack against the temple of Elam in southwest Iran. The offensive was a total failure: the King lost his life in the campaign on July 3–4, 187 BC.[33] Ashk's son and successor, Priapatios (r. 191–176 BC), took advantage of these developments to counterattack, effectively wiping out all of Antiochus III's previous gains against Parthia.

Farhad I: The rise of Parthia

Parthian expansion began anew during the reign of Antiochus III's successor Seleucus IV (r. 187–175 BC). Seleucus IV was successful in forcing Armenian king Artashes (Artaxias) to submit to his authority and restoring Seleucid authority in the cities along the Persian Gulf coast, but he could do little to reverse the growing Parthian strength.[34] After his assassination, his younger brother Antiochus IV (r. 175–163 BC) became king.[35] Like his father before him, Antiochus IV failed to storm the temple of Elam, and was soon expelled from Persepolis after a successful uprising by the populace.[36] The one possible success is a certain Numenius (governor of Mesene), who defeated a Persian naval force in the Straits of Hormuz, possibly during the reign of Antiochus IV.[37] After his defeats in Persis and Elam, Antiochus IV retreated to Ecbatana. The King died in southern Media in 163 BC, after a fall from his chariot.

Rebellions again broke out in Media and Armenia. Under Farhad I (Phraates) (r. 176–171 BC) Parthian domains were expanded to conquer a large portion of the Elburz Mountains and Hyrcania, lost earlier to Antiochus. Strategically, Farhad's success in returning Parthian authority to Hyrcania meant that a staging post was available to strike into Media and effect the final liberation of Persia from Hellenic rule.[38] Garrisons of the Mardian tribe of modern Mazandaran (northern Iran) were soon established at the west end of Hyrcania.[39] From this area, the Parthians would be able to thrust straight towards Ecbatana. Not only had Farhad severed the continuity of Greek rulership over a diminishing Seleucid Empire and Greco-Bactria, he also now threatened Seleucid authority in Persia.

The Caucasus: Media Atropatene and Albania

At the time of Alexander's conquests the satrapy of Media included much of Iranian Kurdistan, Luristan, parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iranian plateau up to Hyrcania in the north, and Iranian Azerbaijan to the northwest. To the north of Azerbaijan, across the Araxes River, was Albania (modern Republic of Azerbaijan). Albania had been conquered by Cyaxares in the 7th century BC but was mainly dominated by Kartvelian speakers. Iranian Azerbaijan (south of the Araxes River) had been Iranicized by the Medes as well as by Scythian invaders from the Ukraine. The region was Iranian-speaking until the arrival of Seljuk Turkish invaders in the 11th century AD.

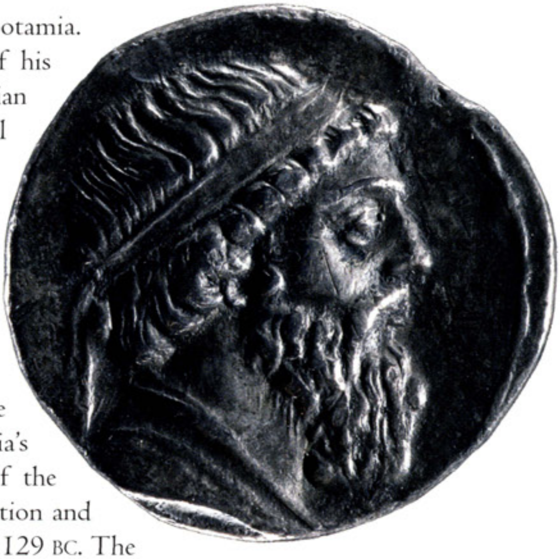
The region of Media in northwest Iran became known as Aturpatekan (lit. the land of the guardian-keeper of the flame) named after one of Darius III's generals, or Media Atropatene to the Greco-Roman world. By the end of the Seleucid era, Atropatene had two capitals, Praaspa (near modern Maragheh) in the winter and Ganzaka (Old Iranian: treasury – near modern Miandoab) in the summer. The status of Atropatene during

Seleucid rule was much like that of Persis: "authority" was limited to nominal suzerainty. Classical sources affirm that Atropatene was hardly ever under the direct control of the Seleucids.[40] Antiochus III had by 220 BC obtained the submission of Artabazanes of Media Atropatene, but made no attempt to replace or overthrow him or his dynasty. The Armenian King Tigran the Great managed to conquer Albania in the early 1st century BC, but it was the Romans who prevailed. The Parthians retained the designation of Aturpatekan, and distinguished this from Albania by naming the latter as Ardhan, also known as Arran.[41]

Therefore, the historical Azerbaijan in Iran was that part of Media that became differentiated into Aturpatekan, later referred to in its Arabic form Azerbaijan after the Islamic conquests of the 7th century AD. While Azerbaijan has been one of the key centers for the development of Iranian civilization and literature since at least the onset of Achaemenid rule, Albania had also become increasingly Iranicized over the centuries. In Albania, Iranian Zoroastrian culture synthesized with the already resident Caucasian (post-Kartvelian) element, a process seen in much of the Caucasus, where Iranian influence grew considerably by the Sassanian era: "The oldest outside influence in Trans-Caucasia is that of Persia … many of its populations, including Armenians and Georgians, as well as Persians and Kurds, the Transcaucasus had much closer ties with the … Sassanian world to its south and east than with the [Greco-Roman] world to the west."[42] The clear distinction between Albania-Arran and the historical Azerbaijan in Iran has been verified by Greco-Roman sources such as Arrian, who noted that "the region north of the Araxes River is cited as Albania and south of the Araxes as Media Atropatene," and corroborated by Islamic sources.[43] After the Alan invasions of AD 75, Iranian languages became as widespread in Albania as Armenian and Caucasian-Kartvelian languages. The fact that both Albania-Arran and historical Azerbaijan in Iran were Iranian-speaking before the Turkish Seljuk arrivals in the 11th century AD has been corroborated by 10th-century AD Islamic authors.[44] Albania-Arran was known by its historical name until 1918, when the designation of Republic of Azerbaijan was adopted at the behest of pro-Ottoman and pro-Young Turk activists in the Caucasus after WWI.[45] The historical Azerbaijan in Iran was to play a pivotal role in the history of both the Parthian and succeeding Sassanian empires.

The end of the Seleucids

Mehrdad I (Mithradates) (r. 171–138 BC) is credited with having consolidated Parthian power. He first struck decisively at the Greco-Bactrian kingdom of Eucratides at his northeast. Not only was the frontier secured in Parthia's favor, but the Bactrian-ruled regions of Tapuria and Traxiana were conquered as well.[46] With the northeast pacified, Mehrdad could now concentrate on Media. Timarchus the ruler of Media (Eucratides' ally) had been ejected by Demetrius I Soter, who proved unable to halt Mehrdad's advance toward Ecbatana in 148–147 BC.[47] At this time, the Seleucids were riven with internal conflicts, which hampered their ability to combine their forces effectively against Mehrdad. By 141–140 BC, Mehrdad had entered the Seleucid capital (Seleucia on the Tigris). He then captured the Seleucid King Demetrius II (r. 146–141 BC) in 139 BC and was crowned as king. The capture of Seleucia on the Tigris ensured Parthian dominance of the economically rich and agriculturally fertile Mesopotamia. Mehrdad also captured Persis, Elam, and Media. By the end of his reign, Mehrdad had extended Parthian rule across the entire Iranian plateau, much of Mesopotamia (Babylon), and sections of Central Asia. To the east, Mehrdad extended Parthia to the borders of India.[48] Just as Farhad II (r. 138–127 BC) became king, the Seleucids made one last attempt to conquer the Iranians. Antiochus VII (r. 138–129 BC) deployed a very powerful army of 80,000 troops in 130–129 BC.[49] They scored several victories against the Parthians, moving into the lowlands of Mesopotamia, and capturing Seleucia and Susa. As Antiochus VII advanced into Media, it seemed for a brief moment that the Seleucids had regained their former stature in Iran. Media's population, however, proved too restive under the harsh rule of the newly returned Seleucids. Farhad II took advantage of this situation and surprised Antiochus with a large Parthian force at Ecbatana in 129 BC. The Seleucid force was wiped out with many troops and Seleucid nobles taken prisoner.[50] The battle of Ecbatana set the final seal upon the 150-year Greek presence in Persia.



Merhdad I (r. 171–138 BC) consolidated Iranian power by entering Seleucia on the Tigris after defeating and capturing Demetrius II (r.146–141 BC). (Topfoto)

The Parthians did not completely sever the Hellenic legacy of the Seleucids. Greek culture continued to be respected, as indicated by the coins of Mehrdad I, which bore the inscription *Phil-Hellene* (Friend of Greece). This was partly done to placate the Hellenic sensibilities of the industrious inhabitants of Seleucia.

The Saka invasions of Parthia

After his dramatic victory at Ecbatana, Farhad II was poised to enter Syria and finish off what remained of the Seleucids there. However, a new danger from the northeast prevented a drive west. The Central Asian frontier had been unstable since the last months of Mehrdad I's rule. The Yueh-Chi, the easternmost of the Iranian-speaking tribes, were forced to flee from their homes in eastern Mongolia before the Hsiang-Nou (proto Hun-Turk) advance. They migrated across Turfan and modern Karashahr, colliding with other north Iranian tribes along the way. They soon invaded the lands of those Saka who had lived in the region since the days of the early Aryan expansions into Central Asia, and pushed them south into Parthia during the reign of Farhad II.

Rather than engage in open warfare against the Saka, Farhad decided to recruit them in his fight against Antiochus VII. The Saka arrived after the collapse of the Seleucids, but were unwilling to leave without pay or a share of the spoils. Farhad was reluctant to compensate the Saka or utilize their services in another war, resulting in the unemployed Saka warriors going on a rampage in Iran penetrating as far west as Mesopotamia.[51] Meanwhile, the bulk of the Sakas in Central Asia had crushed the Greco-Bactrians and stood poised to enter Khorassan in northeast Iran. Farhad and the Parthian army confronted the Saka in the vicinity of modern Turkistan, but were decisively defeated and Farhad was killed. The unreliability of Farhad's Greek heavy infantry, who had been recently released from captivity after their defeat at Ecbatana, was a factor in his defeat.[52] The Saka wars convinced the Parthian military that recruiting Greek heavy infantry was an unreliable proposition at best, and by the time of Mehrdad II's reforms, Greek heavy infantry had disappeared from the Parthian battle order.[53]

Ardavan I (r.127–124 BC) (Artabanus), the son and successor of Farhad II, restored the Central Asian frontier, allowing the Parthians to channel the Saka to the southeast of Iran, where they were permanently settled and began to coalesce into a series of confederations. This area of southeast Iran was originally designated as Saka-istan (modern Seistan).[54] This is reminiscent of the earlier invasion of western Iran and the Near East by the Scythians, who were absorbed by their Iranian Mede kinsmen and designated as the Sak-Vand. The settling of the Saka in Iran is somewhat analogous to the settlement of Germanic peoples within the Roman Empire, who were mobilized by the empire in times of war. A number of these Saka moved to the borders of northwest India (modern Pakistan), where they formed the Indo-Parthian kingdom. Ardavan I eventually died in battle against the Saka, and it was Mehrdad II who politically integrated the "Indo-Parthian" Saka into the Parthian Empire.

Mehrdad II: The revival of Persia

The Parthians were determined to restore the Medo-Persian vision of a unified Iranian state. Mehrdad (Mithradates) II's 35-year reign (123–88 BC) transformed Parthia from a petty kingdom into a powerful empire. Mehrdad II officially reestablished the Medo-Persian title of "King of Kings." Classical sources confirm the Parthian desire to revive the Achaemenid past. Tacitus refers to the Parthians as the heirs of the Achaemenid Empire, while Arrian claims the Parthians as descendants of a certain "Artaxerxes" named "Arsaces" before becoming king.[55] A note of historical irony is provided by Justinus who observed that:

> … in a village of the Parthians named Thara, the immortal gods … ordaining that the Empire of the Persians should have its termination in the country of those [Parthians] who were to succeed them in dominion …"[56]

The restoration of a unified Iranian state began in Parthia, the same region where Darius III had died.

In true Achaemenean tradition, Mehrdad carved his deeds into a bas-relief in Behistun in Iranian Kurdistan, below a similar carving made by Darius the Great centuries earlier. This was symbolic of the revival of the Achaemenid legacy and the reinvigoration of the past institutions of Persia, such as Zoroastrianism. Perhaps equally significant was that the Parthians had reintroduced Iranian as the main vernacular of the state; during Seleucid rule Greek had been the only official language of Persia.

When the eastern frontier was stabilized, Mehrdad focused his attentions westwards, first on northern Mesopotamia against Himerus (*c.*124–123 BC), a quasi-independent Greek ruler of Babylon who ruled his subjects with great harshness.[57] With Babylon and Seleucia secured, Mehrdad turned to Charax in southern Mesopotamia (modern south Iraq and Kuwait).

The Seleucid satrap of Charax with the Iranian name of Aspasin (Hyspaosines) (r. *c.*125–127 BC) declared his independence by approximately 125 BC in southern Mesopotamia, and battled against Himerus. Some historians believe that Aspasin conquered both Seleucia and Babylon between 127–126 BC; however, this is disputed.[58] By

124 BC, Mehrdad II attacked Charax, capturing the capital of Aspasin one or two years later. He overstruck Aspasin's coins to celebrate his success. Mehrdad extended Parthian rule into Mesopotamia as far as the Euphrates River by 113 BC. The Parthian Empire during Mehrdad's reign is reported as having 18 "kingdoms," of which seven were in Mesopotamia.[59] The key cities of Mesopotamia included Ctesiphon (the capital of the Empire), Babylon, Arbela (capital of Adiabene), Nisibis, and later Hatra. The latter was to become an important trading center and cosmopolitan city with a mixed Iranian, Aramaic and Arab population.[60] Mesopotamia became an important region for the Empire and the future Sassanians. This region bore the brunt of many future Roman invasions.

After the acquisition of Mesopotamia, Mehrdad expanded towards Syria and captured Dura Europus. This resulted in the first official contacts between Rome and Parthia,[61] namely between Orobaz (Orobazes) the Parthian ambassador, and the Roman governor of Cilicia in 95–92 BC. No meaningful agreements were made, possibly setting the stage for future Roman-Parthian confrontation. In the Caucasus, Artavases, the king of Armenia, was defeated and his son Tirdad (Tiridates) placed as a hostage in Mehrdad's court. He was later released in exchange for a significant portion of Armenian territory. Tirdad was subsequently installed as the Parthian ruler of Armenia by 95 BC.

The rise of Ctesiphon and the Silk Route

The proximity of the original Parthian capital at Mithradadkert (Nysa) to Central Asian Saka raids obliged the Parthians to shift their seat of power westwards. The "second" Parthian capital was relocated to Hyrcania (northern Persia) at Hecatompylos (near modern Damghan). After Mehrdad I defeated and captured Demetrius II in 139 BC, his troops set up a military camp on the eastern bank of the Tigris River across from Seleucia. These were the beginnings of the city of Ctesiphon, which was founded in the late 120s BC. By the time of Godarz I (Gotarzes) (r. 91–80 BC), Ctesiphon was a major political center, but the finalization of the city as the Empire's capital did not occur until the time of Orod (Orodes) II in 58–57 BC.

There appears to have been further expansions of the city during the reign of Valaksh I (Vologases) (AD 51–80). Ctesiphon was to grow much larger by the advent of the Sassanians and flourished as a major center of Iranian arts, music, and culture. The city merged with Seleucia and other nearby settlements into one vast sprawling urban metropolis, which the Arabs called al-Mada'in (lit. the cities). Many of the architectural styles and arts of the "Greater Ctesiphon" influenced (and were influenced by) the Byzantine west. After its fall to the Arabs in the 7th century AD, Ctesiphon was to exert a powerful legacy on the arts and architecture of the Islamic world.

Mehrdad II treated Seleucia well, by granting its Greek community considerable autonomy. The reason must have been practical, as the Greeks were a strong force in the Parthian economy and trade. Goods arriving to Ctesiphon could now be ferried across the Tigris to Seleucia on the western bank of the Tigris, moving between the vast trade routes of east and west. With the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia finally secure, Parthia was now in control of major overland trade routes linking India and Persia, and from there to the west. Parthian and Chinese successes in pacifying parts of Central Asia soon opened new possibilities for trade between Parthia and China. By 115 BC, Mehrdad II's officials had signed trade agreements with Han China. These were the beginnings of the "Silk Route"

Dura Europus was originally founded in 303 BC by Nicanor, one of Seleucus I's generals. It was conquered by the Parthians in 113 BC. The city fell temporarily during the Trajan campaigns and permanently to Corbulo in AD 165. The Roman presence went largely undisturbed until its fall to Shapur I in AD 256. (akg-images/Hedda Eil)

through Central Asia. Three centuries after Mehrdad's reign, the trading posts, Palmyra, Hatra, and Mesene (Charax) became powerful cities. Parthian-Chinese trade relations resulted in the rise of state revenues allowing for an expansion of architecture and arts.

Mehrdad placed Persia as the intermediary of trade between the "East" (China) and the "West" (Rome). Through this network Rome exported a variety of oils, wines, gold, manufactured goods, and imported Indian ivory and steel, Chinese perfumes, spices, and silks. A king of Parthia cited by Chinese sources as "Manch'iu" is reported to have dispatched gifts to the Emperor of China, notably lions and ostriches.[62] The Silk Route had a profound influence on Chinese culinary arts. Parthia began to export to China a variety of culinary items employed in Iranian cuisine, such as onions, cucumbers, and saffron. In return, the Chinese introduced the silkworm and apricot to Persia. The Silk Route led to the rise of an economically prosperous empire, which soon attracted the martial attentions of Rome.

The Rise of Armenia

The fall of Antiochus III had serious repercussions in the Caucasus. Antiochus had sent two generals with the Iranian names of Artashes (Artaxias) and Zareh (Zariadris) to rule in eastern and western Armenia respectively after the revolt of Xerxes of Armenia. Following Magnesia, both now carved out their own separate kingdoms. Zareh attacked Sophene and northern Mesopotamia, while Artashes created "Greater Armenia" in modern Armenia in the Caucasus.[63] Artashes expanded south across the Araxes River into Atropatene. Artavazdes, who succeeded his father Artashes, maintained Armenian power in northwest Iran. Mehrdad II soon organized a massive counterattack and defeated Artavazdes.[64] What followed is unclear. A certain Tigran II (later the Great) was taken as hostage to the Parthian court, but he was not the son of Artavazdes but Tigran I.[65] Frye has speculated that Mehrdad deposed Artavazdes and installed Tigran I who may have been Artavazdes' uncle.[66]

Coins from the period indicate that during the last years of Mehrdad II's reign, and following his death, a number of "kings" were simultaneously struggling for power in the region, particularly Godarz (Gotarzes) I in the west and Orod I (Orodes) in the east.[67] These dynastic battles of succession between 96–58 BC allowed Tigran II to strike against Parthia. Tigran reentered northwest Iran in Atropatene and conquered Ardan/Arran (modern Republic of Azerbaijan), and parts of Mesopotamia, especially in the upper Tigris River in Gordyene.[68] Perhaps the greatest challenge to Parthian authority was Tigran's assumption of the Achaemenid title of "King of Kings" in the ancient Median capital Ecbatana, thereby laying claim to both Iran and Armenia.

Tigran, however, overplayed his hand, especially by his wresting of Seleucid Syria. This prompted a powerful Roman military reaction in the person of Consul Lucius Licinius Lucullus (118–56 BC). In 69 BC, Lucullus besieged the city of Tigranocerta (the exact location of which is debated, however it may have been close to the Parthian border in northern Mesopotamia) with 12,000 Roman soldiers and 3,000 cavalry. Tigran assembled an overwhelming force of over 200,000 infantry and 55,000 cavalry. On the eve of the battle, a river separated the Armenian and Roman forces. Lucullus' march to the left deceived Tigran into believing that the Romans were retreating. Tigran apparently decided to leave the Roman "retreat" unmolested. This complacency cost the Armenians dearly. Lucullus rapidly turned, forded the river, and landed his army on the Armenian side. The Romans then immediately attacked the Armenian heavy cavalry, or cataphracts, on the right flank, catching them by surprise. Lucullus absorbed the attention of the cataphracts while occupying a small hill situated to the rear of the Armenians with two infantry cohorts. The cohorts charged down the hill with drawn swords, and attacked the cataphracts, stabbing at their horses and unprotected legs. This strike destroyed the cohesion of the Armenian cavalry who rapidly retreated with the remnants of their forces. Lucullus' success at Tigranocerta may well have laid the foundations for the Roman disaster at Carrhae in 53 BC. Tigranocerta was the first Roman experience of post-Seleucid Iranian-style cavalry. Lucullus' victory, alongside contemporary Roman successes elsewhere, may have resulted in a misplaced sense of military superiority over the Iranians. Despite the role of Lucullus' clever tactics in the victory, the Romans had yet to face fully armored lance-charging cataphracts of the Parthian type, or the deadly effects of Central Asian style horse archery.

The destruction of Armenian military power and the capital at Tigranocerta allowed the Parthians to retake their lost territories in Mesopotamia, Media Atropatene, and Ardan/Arran. However, the Parthian process of recovery may well have been underway before the offensives of General Lucullus. The octogenarian Parthian king Sinatruces seems to have recovered Mesopotamia and much of Iran. Armenia would henceforth be an important buffer state, playing a crucial military, cultural, and political role in the volatile relations between Persia and Rome until the age of Islam.

Pontus and Cappadocia: Perso-Greek synthesis

As Parthia gained prominence on the Iranian plateau and in Mesopotamia, Iranian culture experienced a revival in Anatolia. While the Achaemenid Empire had fallen a few hundred years before, the legacy of Iranian culture never departed from eastern and central Anatolia. Just twenty years after the death of Alexander the Great, two independent Iranian monarchies rose in Anatolia – Pontus and Cappadocia. It is significant that their subjects claimed Achaemenid descent,[69] in stark contrast to those Iranians west of the Halys River in western Anatolia, who had become Hellenicized after the Alexander conquests. The Iranians of Cappadocia had fought against Alexander at Gaugamela in 331 BC, and

Bronze statue of a Parthian prince discovered at Shami, Khuzistan. (© Livius.org)

continued to resist the Greeks, even after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire.[70] The Iranian character of Cappadocia was recognized as late as the time of Emperor Augustus by Strabo, who considered Cappadocia as "a living part of Persia."[71] Despite Alexander's destruction of the Zoroastrian-Aryan temples of Asia Minor, Cappadocia still had many Aryan temples and Zoroastrian magi by the advent of Parthian rule in Persia.[72]

The temples of Cappadocia served as centers of worship for the populations of Armenia and Pontus,[73] much as the temples of Media Atropatene did for the Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, and other Iranians of the Parthian realm. While Alexander's conquests and the succeeding Hellenic era resulted in political divisions with different regional monarchies, the cultural unity of the former regions of the Achaemenid Empire continued to endure. Iranian influence extended to the Ionian coast along the Aegean. Plutarch noted that the profound cultural exchanges (especially in arts and architecture) taking place in Ephesus (near modern Izmir in western Turkey), were leading to the latter's "barbarization."[74] In Lycia, Iranian names became widespread among its nobility.[75] However, the characterization of the region as exclusively Iranian is simplistic.

Eastern Anatolia bears a powerful Hellenic and subsequent Armenian imprint. During the Achaemenid era Greek cities began to be founded along the Black Sea coast, just as the Iranian magi, nobility, and settlers were arriving in the region. The Irano-Greek fusion was almost identical to that taking place in the Ukraine, where Greek cities were founded amongst the Iranian-speaking Scythians of the region, resulting in a profound and symbiotic cultural relationship.

Hellenization took longer to find its roots in Cappadocia: the process began slowly a century after Alexander's conquest. By the 1st century BC, however, Antiochus I of Commagene was openly combining the mythology and cultures of Greece and Persia. His genealogy claimed Iranian descent from the Achaemenids, and Greek descent from Alexander.[76] Antiochus spoke Greek but dressed in Iranian style and demanded that the magi dress like the Persians. The surviving statues and architecture of Nimrud-Dagh vividly show the synthesis of Greek and Persian arts and architecture.[77] It is also interesting that the regions of Cappadocia and Pontus failed to attract the same level of Hellenic immigration as those further east and south in Iran and Mesopotamia. As noted by Raditsa, "Hellenization in lands like Pontus and Cappadocia meant that the natives Hellenized themselves."[78]

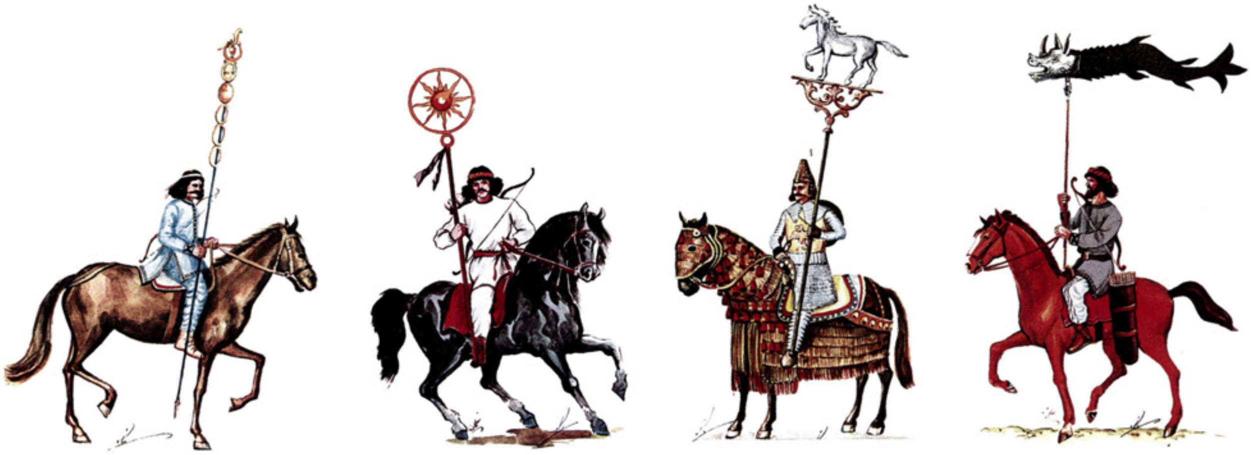
During the reign of Mehrdad II, another Iranian power was to dramatically rise in Anatolia. This was the Pontic Kingdom of Mehrdad (Mithradates) VI Eupator. Mehrdad's kingdom is of special interest, since it combined strong Hellenic themes with an underlying Achaemenid Iranian character. Mehrdad Eupator represented the realization of Alexander's vision: a king proud of his Greek and Aryan origins. Having been raised in the Greek language, Mehrdad Eupator also learned Persian, and the local languages of the Pontus.[79] According to Plutarch, Mehrdad Eupator's female bodyguard, Hypiscrateia, was "a girl ... shown the spirit of a man ... ready to take any risk ... dressed like a Persian."[80]

Roman success in Asia Minor and Armenia: divide and conquer

Mehrdad Eupator struck an alliance with the kings of Commagene and Cappadocia. His empire expanded rapidly across Anatolia, and soon found allies across the Aegean Sea in Greece. Mehrdad Eupator recreated the Achaemenid legacy in Anatolia and the Aegean, and managed to secure the allegiance of the south Ukraine–Crimea region. The military expansions of Eupator, however, competed with Roman ambitions. The Romans launched a series of determined military campaigns in Asia Minor spanning three decades. Eupator appealed to the Parthians for military assistance.[81] The Parthians may have sympathized with fellow Iranian rulers of the Pontus and the Armenians led by Tigran, however, no action was taken on their behalf.[82] Eupator then forged an alliance with Armenia's Tigran the Great. Had the ruling houses of Armenia and Parthia resolved their differences and combined to support Eupator, the military consequences of such an alliance could have been dangerous for Rome. As it was, Armeno-Parthian rivalry allowed Rome to finally destroy the Pontic Empire in 62 BC.

Emperor Tiberius (42 BC–AD 37) attacked Commagene in AD 14, on the pretext that the kingdom was secretly allying itself with Parthia. The Greco-Persian kingdoms were soon annexed by Rome (eastern Pontus in AD 64 and Commagene by AD 72). From this period, the region became a part of the Roman Empire and was increasingly "Romanized."[83] Nevertheless, the region's Iranian cultural heritage never disappeared, even after the arrival of Arabs and Turks during the Islamic era.[84] Eastern Turkey today boasts the largest Iranian-speaking Kurdish population in the contemporary Near East.

Much of central and eastern Anatolia fell to Rome, which also gained influence in Armenia. Parthia was now dangerously flanked from its northwest. With the acquisition



From left, Parthian cavalryman with Mithraic banner, cavalryman with sun banner, Parthian heavy cavalryman carrying a white horse banner, Parthian cavalryman with dragon banner. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

of Syria, Rome threatened Parthian Mesopotamia from its western flank as well. The temptation of an Alexander-style invasion of Parthian Persia was certainly not lost on the military planners of Rome. In that endeavor, Roman diplomacy was already at work against Parthia.

Fortunately for Rome, Farhad III had been persuaded by Lucullus to ignore the appeals of Tigran the Great and Mehrdad Eupator for military assistance.[85] Parthia, however, was soon to fall victim to the classic Roman dictum of "divide and conquer." In 66 BC, Rome appointed Pompey to replace Lucullus as commander of military operations in Asia Minor and Armenia. Almost immediately after acquiring his post, Pompey extended an apparent hand of friendship to Farhad III, with firm promises of territory. Not only did Pompey fail to keep his word, he soon offered Tigran the territory of Gordyene, which was in Parthian hands. Parthian forces from Gordyene were duly expelled with Farhad's protests falling on deaf Roman ears. The Romans showed their disdain for the Parthians by (perhaps deliberately) failing to address the Parthian king with the respect accorded to heads of state. Nevertheless, the Parthians duly signed a peace treaty with Sulla. Undoubtedly, they had a healthy respect for Roman power and did not wish to risk a rash military confrontation against a world-class superpower.

Parthia was to face more indignation at the hands of Pompey's lieutenant, Gabinius. Despite Farhad's clear demand that the Euphrates be set as the frontier, Gabinius flagrantly ignored the King's authority by launching an expedition eastwards across the Euphrates to reach the Tigris. The audacity of the Roman leadership and their disrespect for the legitimacy of Parthia had been vividly demonstrated. Pompey himself is reputed to have planned a possible invasion of Parthia.[86] Interestingly, when Tigran and Farhad decided to negotiate their territorial disputes, it was Pompey who offered to mediate between them. The boundary was apparently set along the northern border of Adiabene (modern Iraqi Kurdistan) and the fortress-city of Nisibis, with Syria being taken by Rome.

Chapter 8

Parthia challenges Rome

The revival of the armies of Iran

The most basic lesson taken from the Greco-Persian wars was that Achaemenid infantry and archers were unable to stand up to Hellenic hoplite and phalanx formations. The most effective Achaemenid forces had been the heavy cavalry of Saka-Chorasmian inspiration, especially at Gaugamela. Iranian cavalry at the time, however, had yet to develop more advanced tactics, armaments, and equestrian technology. Alexander's combined arms concept had negated any advantages that could be afforded by the Achaemenid heavy cavalry. Nevertheless, despite Alexander's successful conquests, developments of heavy cavalry continued in the Iranian plateau, eastern Iran, and the Saka of Central Asia. The long wars with the Seleucids had a profound impact on the organization, tactics, and equipment of the Parthian army. This resulted in the rise of a military machine that would soon challenge the greatest military superpower yet seen in the classical world: the Roman Empire.

Parthian heavy cavalry

Heavy cavalry was known to the Parthians as early as the 3rd century BC. The Parthian knight typically had strong scale armor, a helmet with faceguard, and used armored coats for protecting the horse. The main weapon of the Parthian cataphract was the 12ft (3.6m) lance, armed with a sword-like dagger at front and a butt spike. Parthian lancers are described as deploying "spear with steel ... impetus enough to pierce through two men at once."[1] Describing the Parthian armored lancer, Plutarch observed that:

> their armored cavalry has weapons of offense which will cut through everything and defensive equipment which will stand up to any blow[2]
> ... their helmets and breastplates blazing like fire, their Marginian steel glittering keen and bright, their horses armored with plates of bronze and steel...[3]

The earlier Scythians were noted for their discipline during the lance charge, being able to maintain their formation and cohesion, even after a breakthrough in enemy lines.[4] Although there is no direct evidence of a similar discipline among the Parthian cataphracts, it is quite possible as the Parthians were themselves of Scythian/Saka stock, and maintained their close military links with their Saka kinsmen.

Parthian armor provided a large degree of protection against contemporary Roman javelins.[5] Perhaps most interesting is the description by Cassius Dio that Parthian knights carried no shields.[6] This is logical as the knight carried his lance two-handed when charging his opponents. Parthian scale armor is described as having a rawhide base covered with scales of iron or steel able to withstand powerful blows.[7] This armored vest covered the torso and reached to the knees. A classical description of Parthian armor is provided by Trogus Pompeius who stated that: "their armor, and that of their horses, is formed of plates, lapping over one another like the feathers of a bird and covers both man and horse entirely."[8] There were other types of armor, including tubular ring-armor for arms and legs. The heavy armor (perhaps around 125lb/57kg[9]) placed considerable muscular and cardiovascular pressure on the warrior, especially during sustained combat.

The Parthian knights wore "helmets built of steel."[10] By the latter days of the dynasty, the Parthians utilized the Spangenhelm helmet, constructed by riveting tapering pieces of steel or iron together, with a rim around the base. The cataphract was well armed for hand-to-hand fighting with mace, axe, dagger, and long sword. The Parthian sword can variously trace its origins to both Saka and Kushan models, although the latter may have been influenced by the northwest Indian (modern day Kashmir, Pakistan, and Punjab) "broadsword" seen during the reign of the Achaemenids. Perhaps the most interesting description of the equestrian culture of the Parthian cavalryman is by Justinus, who noted that:

> They ride on horseback at all times, on horseback they go to feasts, attend to public and personal business, march out, stand still, and converse ... this is the difference between the freeman and the slaves: the latter go on foot, the former on horseback.[11]

The Parthian kings, and many of the later Sassanian kings, often appeared on the battlefield as armored knights; wearing helmets, weapons, and armor of the highest quality.[12]

By Parthian times, the Achaemenid carpet-saddle was supplemented with a more advanced saddle, curved at the front as well as the back. Terracottas of Parthian and Palmyran origin clearly show these saddles providing firm support for the thighs and the base of the spine, keeping the rider stable and allowing him to lean either way when holding his lance, and engage in slashing actions with his sword. The Parthian lancer now had a much more secure platform than his Achaemenid predecessors, and was able to maintain his position at the moment his lance penetrated a target, while the horse archer could fully focus on powerful and rapid missile delivery.

The invention of the horseshoe considerably increased the effectiveness of Parthian cavalry. Before the horseshoe, cavalry was restricted by the damaging effects that rough terrain and carrying excess weight had on horses' hooves. The horseshoe virtually eliminated these problems, and significantly improved cavalry mobility and performance. The combination of the horseshoe with an efficient road system, originally laid by the Achaemenids, allowed for a rapid horseman to travel approximately 350 miles (560km) in a mere 3–4 days. It is possible that the horseshoe was already in widespread use by the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC.

Parthian horse archers

The Parthian knights were backed up by horse archers who hailed from lesser nobility and other Iranian tribes. They were lightly armed, with little or no armor and sometimes carried small oval shields. While Parthian archers could sometimes be armed with long swords,[13] axes, or daggers, these were functional and defensive. In essence, they were "shock bowmen," best suited for harassment, raiding, and pursuit.[14] The horse archer's primary role was to rapidly launch as many missiles as possible. Horse archery remained a primary battlefield weapon up to the end of the Parthian era, as seen on the quivers carried by Parthian knights fighting Sassanian rebels in the Firuzabad joust relief. Equestrian archery continued its evolution in the Sassanian era.

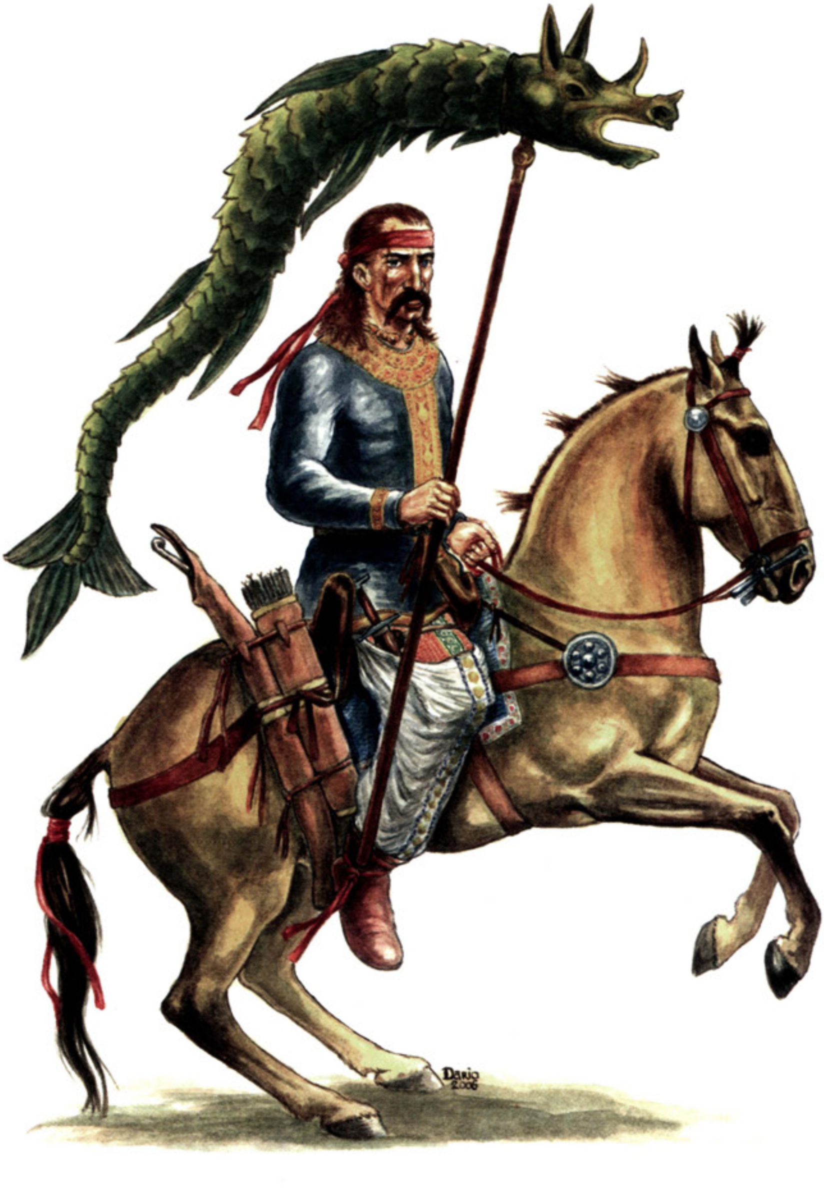
The Parthian bow of Central Asian inspiration was built in various layers of wood, sinew, and bone.[15] This served to increase tension in the bow and control the release of the departing arrow. The Central Asian bow was so powerful that its arrows penetrated the best of Roman armor in the battle of Carrhae where Roman troops:

> encountered a multitude of arrows … ran back for shelter among the men-at-arms … caused … disorder and fear, for they now saw the velocity and force of the arrows, which fractured armor, and tore their way through every covering alike, whether hard or soft.[16]

The Romans quickly realized the inferiority of their archery in comparison to that of the Parthians.[17]

The number of arrows a horse archer carried was limited; the Scythian *gorytos* (quiver and bow case) carried 30 missiles. To destroy an enemy as formidable as the Romans, massive supplies of missiles would be required. The average Parthian horse archer would be able to discharge at least 8–10 shots per minute;[18] with more expert and experienced bowmen capable of an even greater rate of fire. This would mean that the Parthian horse archer's supplies of arrows would be discharged after 2–3 minutes of combat. Assuming that at least 20 minutes of missiles was required to wear down the enemy, the average horse archer would have to fire between 160–200 missiles. Utilizing Heath's system of calculating numbers of discharged Parthian missiles, this would indicate that the 10,000 archers reported at Carrhae would have fired an astonishing 1.6–2 million arrows in 20 minutes.[19] Producing and supplying the number of arrows required by horse archers was a major challenge for the Empire, as it had been for the Achaemenids, which was finally solved by Mehrdad II. A sophisticated network of workshops was established throughout Luristan, Khuzistan, Persis, Khorassan, Hyrcania, and Media.[20] Arrowheads originating from the Iranian plateau, as well as Central Asia, were manufactured in large numbers by a casting system traceable to the early days of western Iran. The reforms of Mehrdad II also solved the problem of rapidly transporting large quantities of missiles to the battlefield and re-supplying the horse archers during the battle. This allowed them to sustain a high rate of fire over the longest period possible. At Carrhae, camel trains were timed to arrive just before the Parthian archers exhausted their supplies of arrows.

What made the Parthian horse archers so formidable was their offensive striking power combined with mobility and agility. Their accuracy was all the more impressive in that they were shooting in many directions whilst moving at speed. They would dart in and out, peppering their foes with arrows in the attack and when retreating, using the "Parthian shot," perhaps one of the most significant (if not famous) horse archery skills known in history.[21] The Parthian shot had been performed as far back as the Medes of the Assyrian era,[22] not to mention the northern Iranian Saka.[23] Despite the passage of thousands of years, the Parthian shot has remained an essential aspect of the Lurs of western Iran. The Parthian shot continues to be re-enacted in ceremonies (weddings, tribal alliances, etc.)[24] and sport competitions among the villages and tribes of Luristan, notably the Sak-Vand (lit. the Scythian race/tribe). The Parthians also used their horse archers to intimidate the Romans during negotiations, placing them, bows in hand, in full view as a reminder of their martial prowess.[25]



Reconstruction of a Parthian horse archer. (© Dario Wielec, dario@hetlof.com)

The all-cavalry doctrine

Parthian battle tactics were simple and effective. There was a clear division of labor between the lightly armored horse archers who "softened up" the enemy, and the heavily armored knights who then charged into the enemy with their lances. The horse archers often began the battle, weakening the enemy lines before the lance charges. The idea was the classic dictum of attacking the enemy where they are at their weakest, and breaking contact where they are at their strongest. The lancers would attack those areas which had been most weakened by the horse archery barrage. The lancer relied on the shock of the charge to prevail, and would engage in hand-to-hand fighting against the tough and well-trained Roman infantryman only in situations of extreme necessity or opportunity. There were also fresh mounts held in reserve to replace those fatigued by the continuous strain of horse archery combat.

The Parthian shot was integrated into the all-cavalry doctrine to maximize the effectiveness of horse archer–armored lancer cooperation. The horse archers would often feign "flight," encouraging the enemy to engage in pursuit. The intention was to wear out the pursuers, and then trap them with the Parthian shot. The impact of the missiles would be all the greater if the pursuers were still moving forwards. This not only caused casualties, but also resulted in disorientation and demoralization. After the execution of the Parthian shot by horse archers, the armored knights struck with their lances.[26] The lancers would then withdraw to allow the horse archers to resume their missile attacks. This could be followed up by another lance thrust. At this juncture, the armored knights would have the option of drawing swords to engage in hand-to-hand fighting, especially if the ranks of heavy infantry lost cohesion. It was these developments in horse archery and heavy cavalry that finally rendered the post-Alexandrian armies of the Seleucids obsolete.

The Roman disaster at Carrhae, 53 BC

Farhad III's sons, Orod II and Mehrdad III, conspired against their father and murdered him in 58–57 BC.[27] The brothers then battled over the Empire. Orod was victorious, and cruelly executed Mehrdad.[28] The actions of Orod II and Mehrdad III set a grim tradition of fratricide and patricide which would plague the Parthian dynasty to its final days.

It was fortunate for Parthia that the dynastic dispute had been settled in a relatively short time, as Roman foreign policy ambitions were becoming more aggressive. Only weeks after his capture of Seleucia, Orod II had to prepare for a powerful Roman invasion led by Marcus Licinius Crassus. As one of the Triumvirate, Crassus seems to have developed an exaggerated sense of his importance, if not military capabilities, after defeating Spartacus' slave revolt in 71 BC. Crassus decided to crush Parthia and annex it as a Roman province.

Crassus became the governor of Syria in April or May 54 BC, at the age of 60. From the beginning of his tenure, Crassus dreamed of becoming a new Alexander, and he intended to use Syria as a launch pad for an invasion of Persia. Despite Rome's explicit non-aggression pact with Parthia, Crassus made thorough military preparations to destroy the Parthians and occupy Persia. This move did not have the full support of the Roman senate as no real justification existed for attacking the Parthians. For its part, Parthia had shown considerable restraint during the campaigns of Pompey and Lucullus and had sought to avoid confrontation by all means possible. This conciliatory Parthian attitude meant that Rome did not have to maintain huge military forces in Anatolia-Mesopotamia-Syria, which may explain why the Roman Senate was so vociferously opposed to Crassus' plans of conquest.

Crassus began his invasion by crossing the Euphrates. Silaces, the Parthian satrap of Mesopotamia, was easily crushed. Rome stationed several garrisons in Mesopotamia, and for the most part, the cities there (with the exception of Zenodotia) did not resist. Crassus rushed back to Syria for the winter to await his son, Publius, who was arriving with reinforcements from Gaul (roughly modern France). For the remainder of the winter, Crassus made preparations for his full thrust into the Parthian Empire. In the spring of 53 BC, Crassus and his son crossed the Euphrates River once more, with a powerful force of seven Roman legions, various auxiliary forces, and counting on the support of Armenian and Arab allies. King Astavades of Armenia promised to provide 16,000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry to Crassus, although the bulk of these never came.[29] The 6,000 Arabs led by Agbar, or Akbar, were to act as Crassus' guides in the desert. The total number of fighting men was 40,000–42,000 men with 4,000 cavalry.[30] One quarter of the latter was from Gaul, courtesy of Julius Caesar. The force also included up to 4,000 light infantry.

Orod II, who was anxious to preserve the peace, sent ambassadors to Crassus to ask whether the invasion had the sanction of the Roman senate. When Crassus told the ambassadors a reply would be given at Seleucia, the eldest of the Parthian ambassadors held out his hand and replied "Hair, Crassus, will grow on the palm of my hand before you see Seleucia." Crassus' inability, or unwillingness, to take Parthian cavalry seriously, soon led to one of Rome's most infamous military disasters.

Crassus' first blunder was to march across the open plains of present-day Syria, towards Seleucia and Ctesiphon, against the advice of the Armenian king, Astavades, who had advised Crassus to avoid the terrain that favored the enemy's heavy cavalry and horse archers. Orod II had expected the Roman thrust to come through Armenia, as Iranian cavalry was at a disadvantage in Armenia's hilly and often mountainous terrain. This would have forced the Iranians to fight hand-to-hand against Rome's legionaries, possibly the world's best-trained infantry force.

The Parthian force split in two. Orod marched into Armenia with his second force (probably mainly infantry[31]) and waited for Crassus. This stopped Astavades from joining Crassus. To his dismay, Crassus now witnessed the Armenians and Parthians becoming allies. Orod and Astavades sealed a political alliance further cemented by a royal marriage between Orod's son Pacorus and Astavades' sister. The young general Surena led the other smaller Parthian force of 1,000 heavy cavalry and 10,000 horse archers. As Crassus decided to march from Syria, it was the smaller force under Surena that he faced. Crassus' Arab guides may have been in collusion with Surena and may have deliberately led Crassus towards Surena's cavalry forces. They then made a pretext and withdrew. Had these light Arab cavalry been present, they may have helped prevent at least some of the crushing losses that the Romans were soon to suffer. Nevertheless, Surena's force was outnumbered three to one, and to Crassus, an easy victory seemed all but assured. Crassus may have been making comparisons between his own invasion force and that of Alexander hundreds of years ago. Such a perspective may have led Crassus to view Surena as the leader of a feckless cavalry force. However, in the coming battle, Iranian arrows would no longer be bouncing off the armor and shields of their opponents, as they had at Marathon, Thermopylae, and Plataea. While the Thessalian and Macedonian cavalry of Alexander

Coin depicting Orod (Orodes) II. It was during his reign that Surena engaged the Roman invasion forces of Marcus Licinius Crassus. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

had prevailed against their Persian and Saka counterparts at Gaugamela, Surena's heavy cavalry would soon prove to be an entirely different force.

The battle at Carrhae

A warning of things to come occurred when Crassus reached the vicinity of Carrhae (near Harran, Turkey). A Roman advance cavalry screen had engaged Surena's cavalry and been destroyed. Disturbing reports of Parthian cavalry attacks on the garrisons left behind in Mesopotamia began to reach Crassus' men. One of the survivors stated that:

> The enemy were so rapid in their movements ... it was impossible ... to overtake them ... their arrows sped faster than light could follow, and penetrated every kind of defense, while their mail-clad horsemen had weapons that could pierce through any armor, and armor that defied the thrust of every weapon...[32]

When the Romans finally reached Carrhae, Crassus ordered them to form a huge hollow square. Cassius, the chief staff officer, had advised Crassus to extend the Roman infantry line further across the plain with the cavalry on the wings. But as the Romans began taking their positions, Crassus changed his mind, and ordered the square with 12 cohorts (each consisting of 500 men) on each side, supported by cavalry and light infantry. Crassus, his personal guard, and his son Publius, along with his 1,000 Gaul cavalry, took up position inside the square.

Surena was waiting. His first plan was to crash through the Roman lines with his 1,000 heavy knights supported by his horse archers. To mislead the Romans, Surena ordered his knights to cover their armor with hides and jackets. The main Parthian force was also hidden. Surena's deception seems to have worked. When the Romans first saw the Parthians, they were duly unimpressed, pleasantly surprised not to see any armored knights. Surena then gave the signal for the knights to discard their covers, their armor blindingly bright in the sun. Parthian drums now signaled instructions to the knights. To the thumping sound of drums, Surena led the knights straight into Roman lines. Despite the intensity of the lance charge, the depth of the Roman lines prevented Surena's lancers from achieving a breakthrough. There was now a danger that the knights would get bogged down in costly hand-to-hand combat. The lance charges appear to have caused some dislocation in the Roman lines but Roman numerical superiority enabled Crassus to seal the gaps. Surena now ordered his knights to disengage in favor of the horse archers who were now ordered to surround the large Roman square and attack.

The horse archers proved impossible for Crassus to defeat, as they constantly darted in and out, rapidly shooting arrows into the Roman ranks at a distance of 150–165ft (45–50m). Unlike at Tigranocerta, the charge of Roman light infantry availed nothing as the Parthian horse archers simply galloped away. The reaction to Roman cavalry was the same; the horse archers simply did not engage them. Roman javelins did not do much to alleviate the situation either: their range fell well short of the distance maintained by the Parthian horse archers. The Romans who did try to pursue the horse archers became victims of the Parthian shot.

The Romans realized that Parthian arrows were easily penetrating through their shields and armor. The deadly effects of the arrow storm were multiplied by the Romans neatly packing themselves into tight ranks. The arrival of numerous camel trains, with fresh supplies of arrows, dashed all hopes of the arrow storm being an uncomfortable interlude:

> as long as they [Romans] had hopes that the enemy [Parthians] would exhaust their missiles and desist from battle or fight at close quarters, the Romans held out; but when they perceived that many camels laden with arrows at hand, from which the Parthians … took a fresh supply… Crassus, seeing no end to this, began to lose heart…[33]

As the continuing arrow storm was forcing the Romans to hold fast, Surena now decided to attack the Roman rear.

Crassus "sent messages to his son Publius with orders to force an engagement with the enemy before he was surrounded."[34] Publius decided to attack the horse archers with eight cohorts, 300 light troops, 500 foot archers, and an assault group of Gallic cavalry. As the horse archers apparently withdrew, Publius pursued them, not realizing he was being lured into a trap. The horse archers joined a larger Parthian force, including armored knights, which now attacked. Publius' Gallic cavalry fought very bravely, but their javelins failed to penetrate the tough armor of the Parthian knights. The Gauls were also poorly armored, which led to high casualties.[35] Only 500 of the Gauls survived to be taken prisoner. The Gauls had tried in vain to slip underneath the Parthian horses to stab them, an action to be repeated by the Romans against the elite super-heavy Savaran knights in AD 363.[36] More interesting are Gaul attempts at trying to pull the cataphracts down from their horses by grabbing their lances, reminiscent of the Achaemenids who tried to break the spears of the hoplites in the battle of Plataea in Greece centuries earlier. Though brave, this operation was extremely risky to the infantryman, as the charging Parthian lancer was fully capable of simultaneously impaling two men with his weapon. Between each attack of the heavy knights, the mobile horse archers would begin riding and shooting into Publius' force. The attacks destroyed Publius' forces. The wounded Publius retreated with his remaining men to a hill, where they fought to the death or were forced to surrender. The wounded Publius and the bulk of his officers committed suicide or ordered their shield bearers to kill them. The Parthians cut off Publius' head, fixed it on a lance, and rode back to Surena's main force.

Ceramic plaque of a mounted Parthian archer. (R. Sheridan, Ancient Art and Architecture)

As soon as messengers bought news of his son's death, Crassus relocated his army to sloping ground and attempted to move forward. This action achieved little. The Parthian bowmen kept up their deadly arrow storm, forcing cracks in the Roman lines. The knights would then charge into these cracks to inflict more casualties. Roman professionalism, training, and bravery were to no avail.

In an attempt at psychological warfare, Surena had Publius' head paraded on a spear in front of the Roman lines. By now the Romans were doomed, and Surena offered Crassus his life if he surrendered. Crassus was given one night to decide and to mourn the loss of his son. Realizing the reality of defeat, Crassus' senior officers suggested withdrawal to the fortress-city of Carrhae. Staying put was not an option, so the Romans withdrew at night, knowing that the Parthians did not engage in night-combat operations. The Parthians did not contest this movement and in the morning, they occupied the abandoned Roman camp and slew the abandoned Roman wounded.

By withdrawing, Crassus had admitted that his "Alexandrian" adventure had been lost. There remained a glimmer of hope, however. If Crassus could reach the safety of the walls of Carrhae, he could make a stand there. Normally, there could be an enormous advantage for Crassus in such a situation, since the Parthians were not skilled nor equipped for sieges. Crassus' forces, however, had no wish to stay in Carrhae: provisions were short and the foothills of Armenia were close by. Worst of all, no relief was in sight as most of the troops in the Near East had already been used up at Carrhae.

Crassus and his high-ranking officers, Cassius and Octavius, all escaped independently. Cassius escaped toward the Euphrates with 500 horsemen. Octavius marched to a hill with 5,000 men. Crassus, along with approximately 2,000 men, followed about a mile or so behind him. The Parthians attacked again, however, and Octavius rushed down from his place of relative safety. United, and with a total of 7,000 men, Crassus and Octavius were more or less successful in fending off later Parthian onslaughts. Roman slingers had been able to fend off the Parthian horse archers and heavy cavalry. Both realized that this was a temporary respite. The initiative was now firmly in Parthian hands, and Surena was not about to let it slip from his grasp. In any event, the battle had been decided.

Surena again made overtures of honorable surrender to Crassus. Crassus wavered, then seems to have accepted Surena's offer of negotiations. Crassus and his senior officers met Surena, and the terms of surrender were arranged. However, Surena felt that the Romans could not be fully trusted, as it was they who had broken the peace treaty with the Parthian Empire. In lieu of this fact, Surena stated that: "... you Romans have not got very good memories about the terms of treaties."[37] The defeated Crassus was obliged to put his surrender terms in writing. For reasons not entirely clear, a melee followed, and Crassus was killed, either by the Parthians or by Crassus' own men. Surena took the heads of Crassus and Publius to the Armenian court, where Astavades and Orod were celebrating their alliance. A Greek play (Euripides' *Bacchae*) was in session, and the heads were tossed onto the stage. The Greek actor Jason added the macabre to his theater, by raising the severed head of Crassus. Orod then ordered gold to be melted down and poured into Crassus' mouth, he then reputedly thundered to Crassus: "be satisfied now with thy life's desire."

The 10,000 surviving Roman troops were taken prisoner and settled by the Parthians in the region of present-day Merv, near Turfan City in Central Asia. It is possible that contingents of these men found their way into China. Chinese sources report a defeated Hun chieftain in 36 BC who had "mercenaries" fighting with techniques consistent with Greco-Roman warfare.

Aftermath of Carrhae

The defeat at Carrhae shattered the vision of Roman military invincibility. Carrhae was a rude shock following Rome's spectacular successes in Spain, Gaul, the Balkans, Greece, Carthage, Armenia, and the Pontus.

Although the Seleucids had been defeated earlier, Carrhae symbolized the dramatic end of Alexander's legacy in Persia. Surena had destroyed a Roman force three times larger than his own. Of the 40,000 Roman legionaries, 20,000 had been killed by knights and horse archers and 10,000 captured. The captured Roman standards were put into the temples of Persia, to be returned only after negotiations with Emperor Augustus. The Romans now realized that their Iranian opponents were not in the same category as the warriors of Celtic Europe, and were forced to acknowledge the Euphrates as the fluvial border between them and the Parthian Empire. As noted by Bivar, "the upshot of the [Carrhae] debacle was to win unquestioned recognition for Parthia as a world power equal."[38] The myth of Roman invincibility had also been shattered among the Jews, who were not only friendly with the Parthians, but whose historical relations with Persia are attested to in Biblical sources. The Romans soon found themselves facing fierce revolts by their Jewish populations in their eastern territories.

Roman military development was profoundly influenced by experiences against the cavalry of the Parthian Empire. The first Roman attempt at recruiting Parthian cavalry was during the Civil War by Pompey and Cassius.[39] Parthian cavalry did fight as mercenaries in 42 BC against Octavian.[40] The shock of the defeats at Carrhae and later in Azerbaijan (37 BC) finally led to the adoption and development of the Roman equivalent of the Parthian horse archer. Fully aware of the dangers posed by the Parthian all-cavalry military doctrine, the Romans successfully reorganized their military by recruiting auxiliary cavalry (light, horse archer, and heavy) and infantry archers. These auxiliaries were to support the main body of Roman heavy infantry, who themselves successfully developed new tactics to confront the Parthian heavy knights and horse archers.[41]

A further consequence of Carrhae was the Parthianization of Armenia. The marriage of Orod's son Pacorus to Armenian King Astavades' sister introduced a distinct Parthian lineage into the Armenian royal house. This became yet another link in the long-standing relationship of the Armenians to Iran. It is a fact that even after the fall of the House of Parthia in Persia in AD 226, nobles of Parthian descent continued to rule in Armenia.[42] Much of Iran's feudal culture and warrior tradition were to be adopted by the Armenians, many of who would later enter the armies of the Byzantines.

The Pacorus offensives: missed military opportunities

Had Surena launched an offensive into Syria following Carrhae, the consequences for Roman rule in the Near East could have been catastrophic. The Romans were in a state of disarray and did not have enough troops to stem a Parthian invasion. They were to be rescued by the bloody internecine politics of the House of Parthia. Orod II had Surena executed shortly after his brilliant victory at Carrhae. Orod's petty jealousies and suspicions against Surena resulted in Parthia losing its window of opportunity: the Parthian counterstroke did not materialize until three years after Carrhae.

Orod decided to place his son Pacorus I in charge of the armed forces. Pacorus initiated a series of battles with the Romans in 51 BC, which spanned 25 years. He managed to invade Syria and much of Anatolia, yet this was more of a large cavalry raid than a full-scale invasion. The Parthians had never developed siege warfare skills, and they were to pay for this dearly. The demonstrations of the Parthian cavalry could do little to militarily force Roman fortress-cities to surrender: Cassius and Cicero were able to prevent the Parthians from annexing Syria. Orod ordered his son to withdraw, and a year later, in 50 BC, Pacorus crossed the Euphrates back into Parthia.

In the following years, Rome's internal political situation steadily deteriorated and this provided a perfect opportunity for military intervention. If Orod moved wisely he could potentially manipulate Roman political developments and gain more territory, increasing Parthian security and power along its western frontiers. Orod decided to mount a second invasion of the Roman Near East in Syria and Anatolia. Pacorus was again placed in command, and was to be accompanied by Quintus Atius Labienus, who was essentially a Roman republican who opposed the "Imperialists" now dominating Rome's foreign policy.

By 40 or 39 BC, Pacorus and Labienus crossed the Euphrates with a powerful Parthian cavalry force. The focus of the invasion was the Roman outpost of Apamea, founded originally by Seleucus Nicator around 300 BC. The first attack was indecisive as the Parthians were neither trained nor equipped for siege warfare. Nevertheless, many Roman troops in Syria were deserting to join Labienus. The Romans under Decidius Saxa made a desperate stand against the large combined force of Labienus and Pacorus,[43] now accompanied by Roman deserters. The Parthian cavalry proved decisive, causing high Roman losses, and forcing Saxa's forces to collapse. Even more Roman troops deserted to the Parthian invasion force. Apamea now yielded to the invasion force with very little resistance, reputedly due to reports of Saxa's death.[44] Labienus split off from Pacorus' forces to pursue Saxa. Saxa managed to reach Cilicia, but Labienus destroyed him and his force after capturing Antioch. With the final destruction of Saxa and his forces, Labienus not only captured Cilicia, but cleared all of Asia Minor of Roman troops. In yet another blow to the prestige of Roman arms, Saxa's captured standards were dispatched to Parthia's temples to be erected alongside those already captured at Carrhae. Meanwhile, the Romans had again proved incapable of halting Parthian cavalry forces that rapidly overran much of Syria and Palestine. Tyre remained outside the grasp of the Parthians, as they lacked the naval forces necessary to capture it.[45]

In Palestine, the Parthian cavalry were welcomed as liberators by the Jewish populace. A certain Antigonus even offered a thousand talents to Pacorus in order to be installed as a Parthian client in Palestine. The Jews had enjoyed a long tradition of acceptance and settlement in Persia as far back as the Mede and Achaemenid empires. However, the Romans had never won many friends among the Jews and were unable to stem their pro-Persian sympathies.[46] Although not widely known, the Jews of Mesopotamia were the source of Jewish orthodoxy, which inspired much of western Jewry, notably in Judea.[47] Pacorus' success in entering Palestine meant that Mesopotamian and Judean Jews were again (albeit very briefly) united within a new Iranian Empire. The Parthians also had the support of the Pharisees, a sect with which Rome had had cool relations in general: "the Pharisees seemed to feel that they received a greater measure of understanding from the Parthian than the Roman, and consequently became loyal adherents of the pro-Parthian party."[48]

Romans recover from the Parthian invasion

Just as Pacorus and Labienus seemed to be permanently expelling the Romans from the Near East, the tide turned against them. The first to fall was Labienus in Asia Minor in 40 BC. The Roman General Ventidius[49] landed on the coast of Asia Minor (most likely in modern western Turkey) and caught Labienus by surprise. Labienus sent frantic messages to Pacorus asking for assistance. In the meantime Ventidius rapidly pursued Labienus into the interior of Anatolia and forced him to take refuge towards the Tarsus Mountains. When Ventidius reached the Tarsus range, both sides awaited reinforcements. Labienus was awaiting the arrival of Parthian heavy armored knights.[50] Ventidius was patiently waiting for the arrival of his heavy infantry before making his strike. Instead of ineptly placing his infantry on flat terrain as Crassus had done, Ventidius wisely deployed his forces onto higher ground. Inexplicably, the Parthian knights, acting independently of Labienus, rashly charged up the hill toward where Ventidius' troops were waiting. The uphill charge impeded the knights' momentum, and reduced their collective striking power. They crashed into the solidly entrenched and compact Roman infantry formations and had to engage the Roman infantrymen in hand-to-hand combat. Ventidius' men defeated the Parthian knights, who departed the field toward Cilicia, leaving Labienus to his fate. The Roman forces of Labienus later attempted a night withdrawal, but were trapped and slaughtered in an ambush prepared by Ventidius. Labienus did mange to escape to Cilicia. However, he was soon captured and executed for treason by the Romans.

Ventidius consolidated the Roman position in Cilicia and from there the Roman reconquest of its lost Near Eastern territories began.[51] Pompaedius Silo was dispatched to lead a cavalry force towards the Syrian Gates, and from there to break into Syria and engage the Parthian forces in that country. Pacorus was aware of Roman intentions at the Syrian Gates, and had already sent a force of knights led by Pharnapates to block Roman thrusts in that theater. Pacorus decided to deploy his forces towards northern Syria and Commagene. Pacorus' Jewish allies now had to fend for themselves until the anticipated return of the Parthian cavalry. Unfortunately for the Jews, Pacorus never returned. When Pompaedius Silo arrived at the Syrian Gates he found the Parthian knights of Pharnapates waiting for him. The Roman cavalry were outperformed by the Parthian knights who very nearly succeeded in destroying Silo's forces.[52] Silo was on the verge of defeat when Ventidius' timely arrival with heavy reinforcements turned the tide. Pharnapates and many of the Parthian knights were killed. As the Parthian position in Syria collapsed, Pacorus retreated

Partho-Sassanian gold buckle, Iran, 2nd–3rd century AD. The center of the buckle depicts a mounted nobleman and his hound in pursuit of gazelles. The hunt theme was to appear among the nobility of Northern Europe centuries later. (© The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

with the remainder of his forces across the Euphrates into Mesopotamia. He planned to reorganize his troops in the winter before thrusting back into Syria in the spring. By now, Ventidius had completed the Roman reconquest of Syria and much of Asia Minor.

The Parthians were probably still confident of their ability to defeat the Romans, as they had very nearly defeated them at the Syrian Gates. Nevertheless, as events were to soon show, the Parthians had failed to draw the necessary lessons of their defeats in Anatolia and the Syrian Gates. By the spring of 39 BC, Pacorus had assembled his forces to reenter Syria and to crush Ventidius. Ventidius in turn spread a campaign of disinformation in the Parthian camp, and misled them into crossing the Euphrates at its lower bend. Pacorus may have also been led to believe that Ventidius' camp was unprepared to meet his assault. This resulted in Pacorus wasting forty valuable days of campaign time, which Ventidius' staff fully exploited by furthering their battle preparations and tactical planning.

Having crossed the Euphrates, Pacorus' knights moved across the Syrian plains towards the Roman positions near Cyrrhesticia. Instead of engaging the Parthian knights on flat terrain, Ventidius repeated his tactics from the Tarsus range. He deployed his forces on higher ground, and in a repeat of the Tarsus engagement, the knights charged uphill towards Ventidius and were severely defeated.[53] Pacorus was killed during the battle and the majority of his royal guards were slain protecting his body from capture. The remnants of the Parthian force retired to cross the Euphrates. Ventidius was determined to prevent the survivors from escaping and rebuilding their forces for yet another attack. The Romans pursued the Parthians and slew many even as they boarded their boats. The last survivors of Pacorus' knights managed to evade Ventidius and reached Commagene in eastern Anatolia, where the local king Antiochus gave them refuge. The Parthian conquests of Syria and Anatolia had come to an end. The scale of these conquests would not be replicated until hundreds of years later at the hands of Sassanian kings such as Shapur I and Khosrow II.

Chapter 9

Parthia from Mark Antony to the Alan invasions

Mark Antony's defeat in Media Atropatene

Orod II became so deeply distressed at the death of his son, Pacorus, that he decided to abdicate in favor of one of his 30 other sons, Farhad IV (Phraates IV) (r. 38–2 BC) in 38 BC. Farhad reciprocated his father's gesture by killing him, all his brothers, and even his own son by 37 BC. Farhad also decimated the Parthian nobility, whose survivors escaped to the Romans. A surviving Parthian nobleman, Monaeses, met with Mark Antony and persuaded him to invade Parthia. Monaeses and the Parthian exiles conveyed the impression that disaffection with Farhad ran high in Persia, and that an invasion could succeed. Mark Antony may have planned a Parthian invasion as early as 41 BC, but decided to first consolidate Roman power in Egypt and Syria. He then decided to strike into Persia from Syria, where a Roman staging post was being formed against the Iranians. The Armenians had been forced into an alliance with Rome, obliging their King Astavades to provide them with cavalry forces. By 38 BC, Antony was training his forces in Greece for his major campaign into Persia.

The Romans prepared a gigantic invasion force, more than double the size of Crassus' doomed expedition. In March 36 BC, Antony commanded a force of at least 100,000 men, including 10,000 Iberian (Spanish) cavalry perhaps riding a type of early "proto-Arabian" horse, first introduced to the region by the Phoenicians or their Carthaginian kin. The smaller Iberian horses, however, proved to be at a marked disadvantage against the superior Nisean steeds of western Iran and Armenia. Aware of these preparations, Farhad summoned 400 of the Parthian *azatan* (Aryan feudal lords), who organized 50,000 cavalry to stave off Antony's invasion.[1] Antony invaded by way of Media Atropatene. By following Astavades' advice to march into northwest Persia's forests and mountains, Antony hoped to negate the tactical advantages that the Parthian knights and horse archers had on open terrain. Roman commanders were hoping to force the Iranians into infantry-style hand-to-hand combat against Rome's legionaries. The Romans, however, had dangerously underestimated the Median infantry of Artavazd, the local king of Media Atropatane.

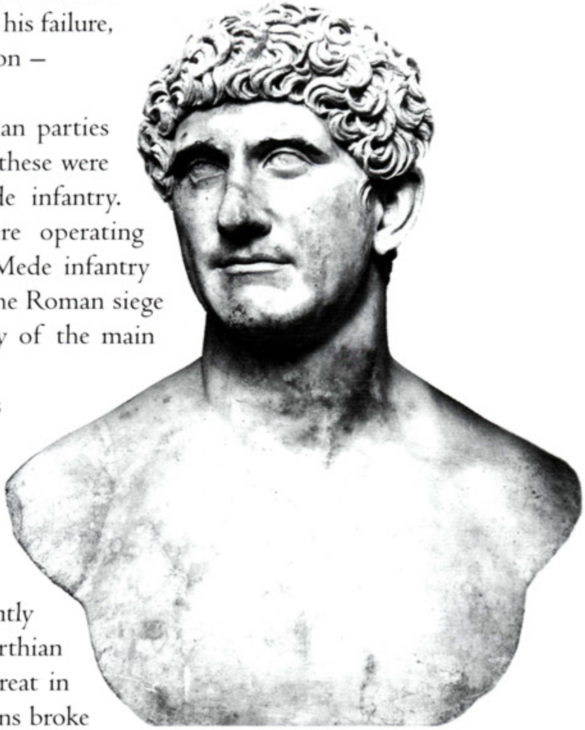
The Romans crossed the Euphrates, and marched towards Iran's northwest around Marand, and then around the eastern bank of Lake Urmia.[2] The objective was to attack the Parthian royal palace-fortress of Praaspa, in present-day Maragheh.[3] It was here that Antony committed a major strategic blunder. The baggage train and siege engines slowed Antony's rate of advance into northwest Persia, so he split his force. He gave Statianus two legions, the baggage train and siege engines, and commanded him to follow the strike force as closely as possible. However, while Antony's troops were able to advance relatively quickly, the mobility of the baggage train and large siege engines were significantly compromised in the dense Azerbaijani forests and mountain passes. As events were to soon show, it may have been wiser for Antony to arrive at Praaspa later but with his entire force.

The Parthian general staff very quickly recognized a valuable military opportunity. With Antony's forces clearly divided in two, the Parthians would be able to focus on each component separately and destroy it. The Parthian general staff now relied on the tough Mede highlanders whose ancestors had proven their worth against the ancient Assyrian Empire. The Mede infantry attacked the Roman baggage train and killed more than 10,000 legionaries. The Medes also destroyed the Roman siege engines, including a huge 79ft (24m) battering ram intended for the gates of Praaspa. The fickle Astavades withdrew with his cavalry to Armenia. The removal of Armenian cavalry from the Roman battle order was as serious as the defeat of Statianus.

Meanwhile, Antony's forces had been allowed to approach Praaspa without interference and were actually in front of the city before Statianus' force was attacked. Roman engineers constructed large earth mounds to begin the siege, unaware that the siege engines had been destroyed. The siege of Praaspa, however, proved to be far more difficult than anticipated, as the fortress was too well defended. Upon hearing news of the loss of Statianus' forces, Mark Antony counterattacked, but his strike against the Parthian cavalry killed only 80 of them and took 30 prisoners.[4] Enraged by his failure, Antony lashed out at his men for their "cowardice" by decimation – the execution of every tenth man.

Antony's troops were soon facing starvation. Although Roman parties were being sent into the forests to forage for food and supplies, these were severely mauled by Parthian lancers, horse archers, and Mede infantry. Contrary to Roman expectations, the Parthian cavalry were operating efficiently in the "European" terrain of northwest Iran. The Mede infantry were also confronting their Roman counterparts with success. The Roman siege effort at Praaspa steadily weakened, increasing the vulnerability of the main Roman force to Mede infantry and Parthian cavalry strikes.

Antony's situation was becoming militarily hopeless, and his troops now faced starvation and disease. The bitter winter snows of northwest Persia were now evident, and the Romans were wholly unprepared for a winter campaign in Persia. Antony was finally forced to admit defeat and decided to withdraw from Persia before he and his entire force were annihilated. He dispatched ambassadors to Farhad who received them, apparently "seated on a golden chair and twanging his bowstring."[5] The Parthian king concluded an agreement that permitted the Romans to retreat in peace. However, as Antony broke camp and retreated, the Parthians broke



Mark Antony thrust into the forested and mountainous region of Media Atropatene (modern Azerbaijan) in an attempt to minimize the efficacy of the Parthian cavalry. The expedition ended in a costly failure for the Romans in 36 BC. (© 2006 Alinari/Topfoto) the pledge and attacked. Mark Antony had lost over one third of his forces.[6] These included 20,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry, and a further 8,000 men on his march from Armenia to Syria, mostly due to the harshness of the weather.[7] The Praaspa campaign was a disaster that dwarfed the catastrophe at Carrhae. It was fortunate for the surviving Romans that Cleopatra was available to provide Mark Antony's shattered forces with food, money, and fresh uniforms when they reached Syria. Farhad celebrated these victories by striking over the coins of Antony found in the baggage train. Roman military prestige had suffered yet another blow in Persia.

Antony mobilized a second army for a new Caucasian campaign, but this time he avoided war with the Parthians. The Romans made their ingress in 34 BC to the north of Atropatene, in Armenia. Antony requested Astavades meet him, ostensibly for arranging a marriage between his son Alexander and Astavades' daughter. As soon as Astavades arrived in Antony's camp he was arrested on the charge of having conspired with Octavian. Astavades' son Artaxes sought asylum with Farhad, while Armenia became garrisoned by Roman troops. Antony returned to Egypt with his captive Astavades, who was put to death.

The outbreak of a bitter conflict between Farhad and King Artavazd of Atropatene provided Antony with another opportunity to attack Persia. He struck an alliance with Artavazd and formed a combined Romano-Atropatene force. This met the Parthian army accompanied by Artaxes of Armenia in 33 BC, and defeated them. Time was against Antony however, who was obliged to withdraw due to his conflict with Octavian. This allowed the Parthians to concentrate against Artavazd and regain control of Media Atropatene.[8] Antony was defeated by Octavian in 31 BC at the battle of Actium, just as Farhad was facing a major challenge to his rule.

Despite the recent success of Parthian arms, Farhad's position was far from stable. In 31 BC, Farhad was forced from the throne by the usurper Tiridates III. Taking refuge with the Saka, Farhad soon re-entered Parthia, forcing Tiridates to flee to Syria. Tiridates made one last entrance into Mesopotamia in 27 BC, hoping for Roman help, which never materialized. Farhad, however, permanently expelled Tiridates a year later and recaptured his capital Seleucia. Tiridates fled to Roman Syria for the last time, never to return.[9] Having fought two Roman invasions and narrowly escaped a dangerous challenge to his throne, Farhad was amenable to an accommodation with Rome.

The negotiations of Augustus

Octavian (63 BC–AD 14), the victor at Actium, became Augustus in 27 BC. By this time the Parthians were in firm control of the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia, as well as the lucrative Silk Route that traversed these lands. The Parthians also wielded considerable influence in the Caucasus. Augustus abandoned the policy of military confrontation against the Parthians. Diplomacy and negotiation would now be used to settle Rome's disputes with her rival in the east.

When Tiridates fled to Syria in 31 BC, he had abducted one of Farhad's sons. The Romans returned him on condition that Farhad would release the large number of Roman prisoners in his custody, and return all standards lost at Carrhae. Farhad formally accepted this request by May 20 BC; Roman prisoners were released and the Roman standards removed from the Parthian Darb-e-Mehr (Mithraic and Zoroastrian temples) and handed over to the officials of Emperor Augustus. To the citizens of Rome this was hailed as a great success, as Augustus had restored Roman honor through diplomacy, an act celebrated by the erection of triumph arches in Rome and the striking of coins throughout the Roman Empire. This also released subsequent Roman emperors from disastrously attempting to conquer Iran in emulation of Alexander the Great. Augustus' policies allowed the Roman Empire to focus more on economic development and the welfare of its citizenry.

Farhad V to Godarz II

Perhaps the most enigmatic gift of Augustus to Farhad IV was the beautiful slave girl Thea Musa.[10] Musa bore a son, named Farhad V (r. 2 BC–AD 4). Farhad IV sent his sons, except Farhad V, to Rome to receive a "Roman" education. In a macabre act of patricide, Farhad IV was murdered by his own son in 2 BC, perhaps due to the intrigues of Musa. It was during the brief reign of Farhad V that the Parthians and Armenians collaborated to eject the pro-Roman ruler of Armenia from power, in favor of Tigran. Augustus duly mobilized his forces and placed them under the command of his grandson, Gaius. Warfare was avoided as Gaius and Farhad V settled the Armenian question in terms favorable to Rome.

After the settlements, Farhad V married his mother, Musa, in AD 2. This act of incest caused considerable revulsion among the nobles which, joined to their hostile feelings toward Farhad, soon led to their rebellion. The Parthian gentry duly deposed Farhad V, who fled to Roman Syria in AD 4.[11] Orod III, who succeeded Farhad V, was murdered by AD 7 or 8. In Orod's place came Varan I (Vonones) (r. AD 8–12), another of Farhad IV's sons, who was a resident of Rome. Varan I's demeanor proved to be even more "Roman" than his predecessor Farhad V. Notable were Varan's lack of interest in horses, the royal hunt, and courtly banquets.

The "Roman" court of Varan I appeared to have elicited a very "Iranian" reaction from the nobility and populace. This materialized in the person of Ardavan III (Artabanus) (r. AD 12–38), who had previously been the Parthian king of Media Atropatene. Ardavan had resided for a long time among the Dahae Saka of the eastern Caspian Sea. He dressed in the traditional Iranian riding costume seen on the Iranian plateau since the arrival of proto-Iranian peoples thousands of years ago. Ardavan III soon organized an army and ejected Varan I from power in AD 12.[12] Ardavan had to struggle to maintain Parthian authority in Mesopotamia. To the north of Ctesiphon, an independent mini-state had been established by the Jewish rebels, Asinaeus and Anilaeus, who were supported by their own private army.[13] This lasted for approximately 15 years before Ardavan finally subdued it. Ardavan then ruled the Empire in relative peace until his death in AD 38.

Ardavan was succeeded by his two sons, Godarz II (Gotarzes) (r. AD 40–51) and Vardan I (Vardanes) (r. AD 40–47), each of whom ruled separate parts of the Empire. By AD 47, Godarz had seized all of Parthia after murdering his brother in a hunting expedition. A year later, Godarz was fighting another one of Farhad IV's grandsons, Mehrdad, who had been summoned from Rome by the Parthian nobles. Godarz overcame Mehrdad and commemorated this on a rock relief in AD 50 at Behistun which still stands today. The relief depicts Godarz as a Parthian lancer; the Greek inscription identifies him as a son of the mythical Guiw, an ancient mythical Iranic warrior-hero.

1st century AD: decline in Hellenicism or Iranian revival?

It was during this period that an Iranian renaissance in the arts, coinage, and language inscriptions began to make itself felt. Achaemenid styles had begun to blend with Hellenic themes, as found in Scytho-Sarmatian Ukraine, and Calabria, Italy. The same was true of Hatra, the ruins of which today betray a unique blend of Iranian, Greek, and indigenous styles of arts and architecture. At Hatra, noblemen and noblewomen are seen wearing Parthian dress. The same occurred in Palmyra, a predominantly Arab kingdom, which was to draw much inspiration from Parthia in dress, militaria, arts, and architecture.

The rising tide of anti-Hellenicism appears to have alienated the Greek populace of Seleucia on the Tigris. A local rebellion resulted in virtual independence from Parthian rule for at least ten years. The Parthians reasserted their authority in Seleucia as it was one of the busiest nodes of commercial traffic that stretched along the Silk Route. What was certain was that, by the time of Ardavan III, the term "Phil-Hellene" was no longer being issued on all Parthian coins. The previous accommodating attitude exhibited by the earlier Parthians such as Mehrdad I towards Hellenicism was now in decline.

The process of a vigorous Iranian revival was well underway by the 1st century AD, a full two centuries before the rise of the Sassanians. This is exemplified during the rule of Valaksh I (AD 51–80) whose reign witnessed the continued strengthening of Iranian culture. The Aramaic script for Pahlavi formally appeared on Parthian coinage, instead of Greek script. The resurgence of Aramaic is very significant, as it was a revival of the main language of the Achaemenid Empire. This symbolized the demise of Greek as a seminal language in the Iranian world. To further undermine the influence of Greek culture, Valaksh commissioned the expansion of the city of Babylon close to Seleucia, a city predominantly Hellenic in culture. It was from Babylon that the future prophet Mani was to announce his teachings and whose doctrines profoundly affected the course of Western and Christian theosophy. Other cities, such as Merv and Susa (Shush), were also to abandon their Greek designations in favor of their Iranian nomenclature. Perhaps most significant was the official endorsement of the revival of Zoroastrianism. Fire altar designs now appeared on coins. Iranian sources also attribute Valaksh I with collecting the lost Zoroastrian hymns and manuscripts of the *Avesta,* centuries after Alexander had destroyed the original Aryan texts. The restoration of the *Avesta* helped lay the foundations of the subsequent Zoroastrian revival of the succeeding Sassanian dynasty of Persis, nearly two centuries later. Valaksh also founded the city of Vologeses, to act as a commercial rival to Seleucia, perhaps in an attempt to reduce the relative importance of the latter in the economic life of the Empire.[14]

Contest for Armenia: Valaksh I versus Emperor Nero

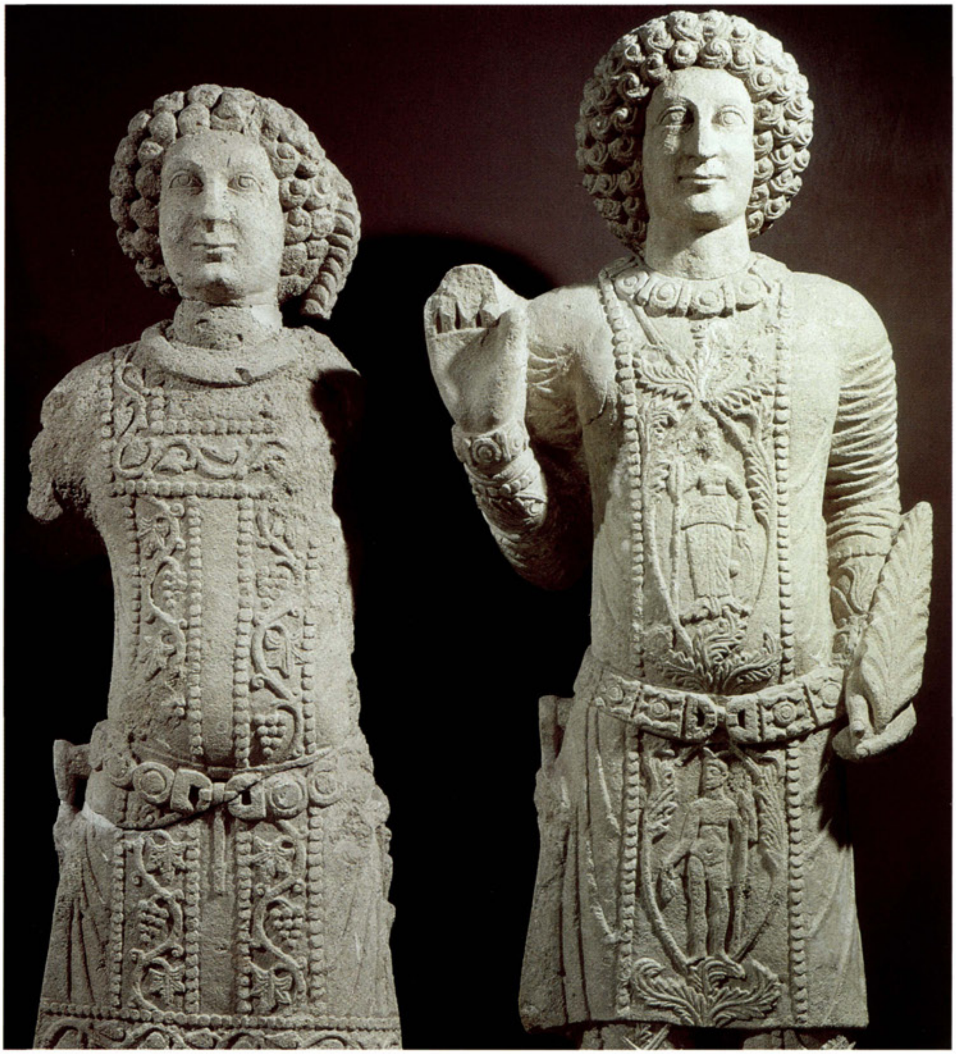
Valaksh I (Vologases) (r. AD 51–80) gained the throne with the assistance of his brothers, Tirdad I (Tiridates) and Pacorus in AD 51, displacing his father Varan II who had briefly ruled. In appreciation for his brothers' loyalty and support, Valaksh I gave Media Atropatene to Pacorus and Armenia to Tirdad, who was installed there by AD 54. Valaksh I had to deal with Sanabares (r. AD 50–65) who had been a rival king within Parthia since AD 50. Sanabares set up his capital at Merv, which he was able to maintain for 15 years, thanks in part to the dynastic struggles within the Empire. Eventually Valaksh vanquished Sanabares and returned Merv to the throne of Parthia.

The Roman Emperor Nero was deeply dissatisfied at the developments in the Caucasus, and planned a full-scale invasion of Armenia to eject Tirdad. It is debatable whether Nero would have initiated an Armenian invasion if the Parthian Empire had been united and free of military distractions. General Corbulo was selected to lead the Roman armies into the Caucasus. Corbulo carefully assessed the state of the Roman military machine in the eastern regions facing Parthia, and concluded that these were unfit for war. The Roman troops were forced to undergo very rigorous training, which spanned well over two years. It is reputed that the harshness of that training took its toll among Corbulo's troops, some suffering frostbite and exposure in the Caucasus. By AD 58, Corbulo was ready to strike into Armenia with his retrained army. The invasion was overwhelmingly successful, and Tirdad was forced to abandon Artaxata, which Corbulo destroyed. No assistance came from Valaksh, who was facing pretenders to his throne[15] as well as a secession movement in Hyrcania, northern Persia (modern-day Gilan and Mazandaran). Hyrcania had been one of the first regions to support Parthia in the drive to reunite the Iranians, but had now turned against the House of Parthia. The Hyrcanians even sent embassies to Corbulo declaring that their region was independent of Ctesiphon.[16]

The unstable political state of Parthia allowed Corbulo to maintain his successful advance into Armenia, and to surround Tigranocerta by AD 59. Facing determined resistance, Corbulo fired the severed head of an Armenian noble into the city, where it reputedly landed right in the middle of a war council. Tigranocerta then meekly surrendered. Tirdad belatedly counterattacked in AD 60, but his offensive was a failure. Corbulo was now in practical control of Armenia, allowing him to hoist the Roman candidate to the Armenian throne. At this juncture, the Romans had the option of thrusting into northwest Persia. Nero's objectives, however, were specifically confined to Armenia; there would be no repetition of the Mark Antony disaster. With the attainment of Nero's objectives in Armenia, Corbulo departed the Caucasus and went back to Syria.

Nero's successes were short-lived. Having finally overcome the rebellion in Hyrcania and eliminated the pretenders to his throne, Valaksh assembled a new army to counterattack the Romans in the Caucasus. The Parthians launched a determined offensive that rapidly unraveled Corbulo's recent territorial and political gains in Armenia. Corbulo was now responsible for the defense of Syria while a new commander, Paetus, was leading the Roman forces in Armenia.

Western historians have somewhat unfairly characterized Paetus as "incompetent"[17] a view that fails to account for the military circumstances that he faced, especially in comparison to Corbulo. Corbulo's previous successes were due to the fact that he was not facing first-rate Parthian cavalry, as these were fighting elsewhere, in places such as Hyrcania. Paetus, however, now faced the full might of the Parthian army, which soon ejected Roman authority from Armenia. He launched the Roman counteroffensive in AD 62, and the Romans had to campaign quickly as the bitter winters of the Caucasus were rapidly approaching. Perhaps aware of the bad experience of Antony's men in the winter season of northwest Persia, Paetus dismissed a number of troops and allowed them to return to Rome. This action is telling, as no competent military leader weakens his position before a decisive showdown. It was at this moment of weakness that Valaksh struck with his most powerful offensive. The Romans were completely defeated. Paetus rapidly withdrew his remaining troops from Armenia, reputedly



Statues of members of the royal family of Sanatruces I, from Hatra. The predominantly Arabian inhabitants of Hatra all wore Parthian dress and arms, and remained loyal to the House of Parthia until its demise in the early 3rd century AD. (The Art Archive / Archeological Museum Baghdad / Dagli Orti)

marching at least 40 miles (64km) a day, abandoning his wounded in the process. Nero's earlier gains had been completely wiped out.

Realizing he was unable to militarily conquer Armenia, Nero came to an official compromise with Valaksh by AD 63. Tirdad remained the Parthian king of Armenia, but he would receive his crown at the hands of Nero in Rome.[18] Nero reciprocated by sending Roman craftsmen to help Tirdad rebuild his Armenian capital at Artaxata.[19] The settlement failed to permanently resolve the "Armenian question," and the Caucasus theater continued to ignite warfare to the end of the Sassanian dynasty, but it did lead to a Parthian-Roman peace lasting five decades. Valaksh maintained good relations with Emperor Vespasian (r. AD 69–79) and even offered him a force of 40,000 horse archers to help him against Aulus Vitellius Germanicus (r. AD 69). Vespasian maintained the peace in the Caucasus and acknowledged the Euphrates as the western boundary of Parthia. A series of small buffer states were peacefully absorbed into the Roman sphere of influence, the most important of these being Palmyra. Vespasian avoided squandering

Roman resources in wasteful military adventures against Parthia. The Emperor directed his military resources to successfully maintain Rome's continental European frontiers.

The rise of the Kushans

The Yueh-Chi, now known as the Kushans, had entered Central Asia, absorbed the petty Iranian and Greek kingdoms of the region, and fully displaced the Saka by the AD 100s. Similar successes failed to materialize against the Parthians, however, who under Valaksh I managed to maintain Parthia's borders against the new Kushan Kingdom to the east and northeast. The Kushan Kingdom at its height in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD was composed of present-day Afghanistan, Central Asia, and northern India. By the 2nd century AD the Kushan Empire had expanded into the Tarim Basin, making them close neighbors of the Chinese. The Hsiang-Nou tribes from eastern Mongolia, however, soon gained power and influence in the Tarim Basin at Iranian expense. The military successes of the Chinese Emperor Ming (AD 58–75) expelled the Hsiang-Nou from most of the Tarim Basin by AD 75. This had profound consequences for Persia and the wider Iranian cultural realm, especially by the Sassanian era.

The Kushans, Parthians, and the promotion of Buddhism

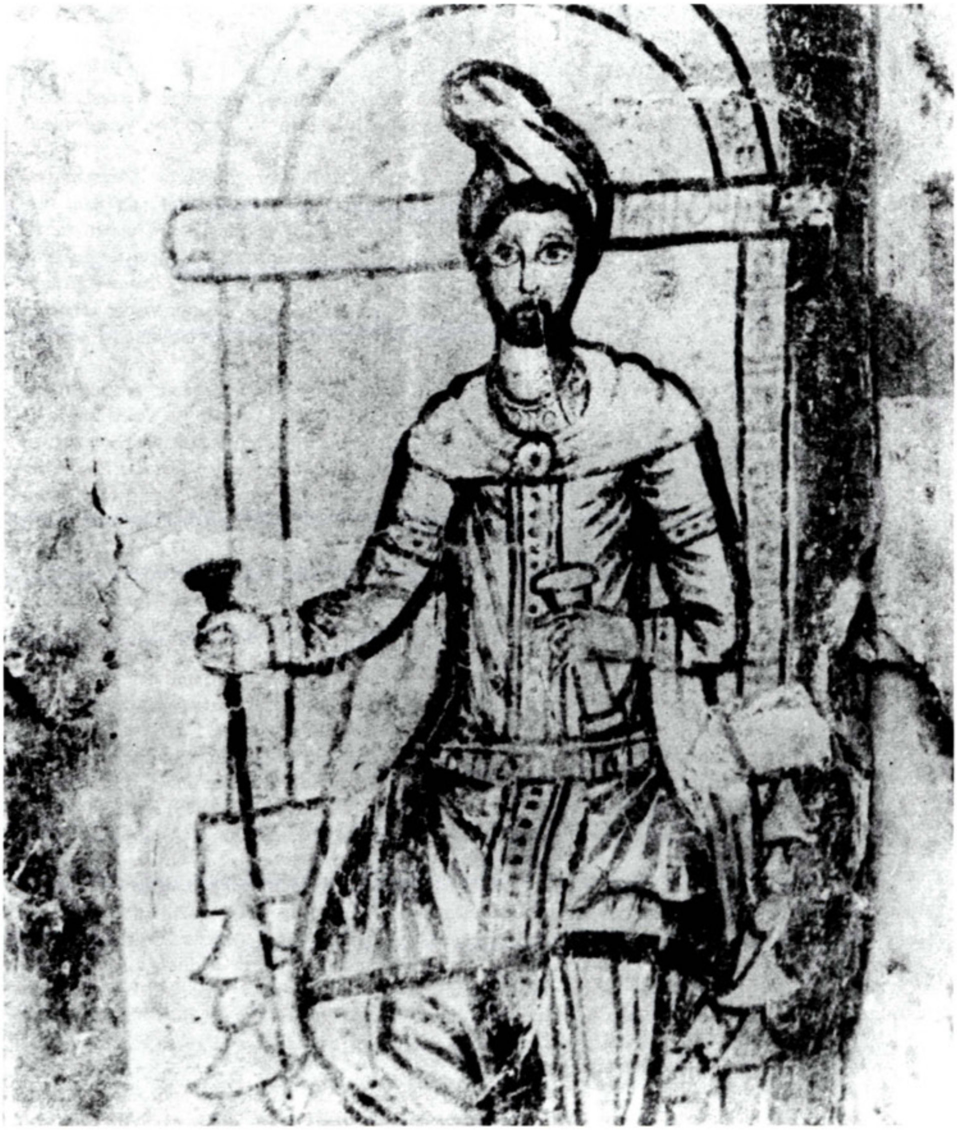
The Kushan Empire reached its zenith during the reign of Kanishka the Great (AD 78–144) who was instrumental in the preservation, development, and propagation of Buddhist religion and arts in the Far East. While the major role of Kushan Buddhist monks in the propagation of Buddhism into Central Asia and China is well known, knowledge of the significant role of the Parthians has been generally confined to scholars. The Parthians were perhaps one of the first Iranian peoples to facilitate the introduction of Buddhism to China. This was greatly assisted by the strong links established between China and Parthia by the reign of Mehrdad II, particularly the Silk Route. Chinese sources report of a Parthian nobleman by the name of An-Shih Kao who arrived as a Buddhist missionary at Loyang in AD 148–170, the Chinese capital at the time. An-Shih Kao established temples in China and initiated the process of translating the Buddhist Hinayana texts into Chinese. Other Parthian monks in China include An-Hsuan (*c.*AD 180), An Fachiin (AD 281–306), and Tan-Ti (*c.*AD 254).

Parthian Mesopotamia: a cosmopolitan population

One of the important consequences of Parthian rule was its impact on the demography of Mesopotamia, as well as nearby Syria. The trade routes that the Parthians controlled across Mesopotamia allowed for the creation of lucrative economic zones in the region. This resulted in economic immigration into Mesopotamia. Arabs from the Arabian peninsula were the most numerous of these, and they became some of the primary settlers of Hatra. Arab tribes also settled in Syria, where they became the primary population of the desert kingdom of Palmyra. Armenians also entered the north, where they intermarried with local Aramaic-speaking and Iranian Mede populations.

Following the sacking of the Temple of Jerusalem in AD 70, the north of Ctesiphon soon became a powerful Jewish center, known as Nehardea. The migration of Jews to

Mesopotamia is of special interest in that the region had been home to a significant Jewish presence for many centuries ever since many of the Jews were liberated by Cyrus the Great. Over the generations these Jews had achieved a considerable position in Mesopotamia and were active in the region's commerce, politics, and cults. The prophet Mani is said to have learned or participated in Hebrew Gnostic cults. The Jews who migrated from Israel to Mesopotamia were joining a prosperous resident population of their kinsmen. Mesopotamia also became resident to a very large Iranian population. This is distinct from those Medes who had lived in northern Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia since the arrivals of the early Aryans in 1,000 BC, who were not necessarily in the majority as the region was already home to a large Aramaic-speaking population, the descendants of the ancient Assyrian Empire. These were known as the Assyrians in



Portrait of Zoroaster at Dura Europus, a Parthian fortress in Syria which was occupied by the Romans in AD 165. This portrait was created after the expulsion of Parthian troops, indicating a strong presence of Iranian creeds such as Zoroastrianism and Mithraism in the Roman Near East. (akg-images) northern Iraq and formed a significant population there up to the First World War.[20] Many of the areas now inhabited by the Iranian-speaking Kurds were former Assyrian settlements, a prime example being the city of Kirkuk. The name Kirkuk is derived from the Aramaic "Karkha D-Bet Slokh" which means "the siege wall."

As in the Achaemenid era, the Iranians who arrived into Mesopotamia during Parthian rule were most likely members of the government, administration, and military. Nevertheless, many also engaged in commerce and trades. The political unification of the Mesopotamian plains with the Iranian plateau allowed for the unhindered movement of large groups of Iranians from east to west. Although colonies of Iranians had certainly settled in Mesopotamia during Achaemenid rule, this process was to accelerate at the time of the Parthians and continue unhindered up to and after the Sassanian era. This factor helps explain one of the reasons for the enduring "Persian" character of modern-day Iraq.[21]

With colonies of Greeks settled after the Alexandrian conquests and under Seleucid rule, Mesopotamia was a cosmopolitan region where Greek, Pahlavi (Middle Persian), Aramaic, Babylonian, Hebrew, Akkadian, and Arabic were spoken together. The Parthians (and the succeeding Sassanians) never sought to alter the demographic of Mesopotamia in favor of the Iranian element. Their policy was to grant considerable autonomy to all the peoples under their rule, resulting in a truly cosmopolitan region where ideas and technologies would be shared and exchanged. Archeological studies have indicated that the rise of farming practices may have also contributed to an increase in the population of Mesopotamia.[22] This also took place in Iran as exemplified by the Shush excavation in Khuzistan. Like the Iranian plateau, northern Persia, and Central Asia, Mesopotamia was an important center of technological developments. The cosmopolitan nature of Mesopotamia's population resulted in the rise of numerous cults such as Gnosticism and the religion of Manicheaism.

The Alan invasions

Towards the end of Valaksh I's rule in AD 72–75, the Alans invaded Parthia by storming through the Caucasus. The Alans who invaded the southern Caucasus were related to the northern Iranian Sarmatian tribes, who were fully dominant along the northern Caucasus, the Ukraine, and parts of Eastern Europe. Their passage in the southern Caucasus is recorded in Armenian sources.[23] The Alans made an alliance with the rulers of Hyrcania in northern Persia, who were no friends of the House of Parthia. The securing of Hyrcanian "neutrality" allowed the Alans to slice southwards from the northern Caucasus into Armenia and Albania (Arran or Ardhan).

The Alan invasion proved unstoppable. When they crashed into Armenia, they not only destroyed the local Partho-Armenian forces, but very nearly captured King Tirdad.[24] Having cleared Armenia and Albania of Parthian forces, the Alans now crossed the Araxes River into Media Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan) where Pacorus was also beaten. In desperation, Valaksh appealed for military assistance from Vespasian.[25] These calls were in vain, as Vespasian had no desire to embroil Roman forces in the Caucasus. Some Iranian historians have also speculated that the Romans may have been content to see the Parthians in disarray, and perhaps secretly or indirectly encouraged the Alan invasion. Whatever the motives for the invasion, the Alan arrival was very much reminiscent of the invasion of the Scythians from the Caucasus, through Armenia into Media Atropatene in the 600s BC.

The reasons behind the Alan military success are still under debate. The Alans and the Parthians were certainly very similar in their use of armored cavalry and horse archers. Alan successes have been attributed to the Alans' ability to outperform the Parthians in lance warfare. Nevertheless, no clear advantages in the weaponry of Parthian and Alan lancers can be identified, which leads to the possibility of superior Alan tactics in lance duels as described by Tacitus.[26] A possible Alan advantage in horse archery cannot be entirely ruled out either. As noted by Brzezinski and Mielczarek: "Rox-Alan horse archers on Trajan's column are depicted in armor similar to the [Rox-Alan] lancers."[27] In contrast, Parthian horse archers as late as the 3rd century AD wore very modest protection in the form of a "pointed felt cap, a woolen 'pullover' tunic, and patterned trousers … protected by baggy overtrousers."[28] The Parthian horse archers' lack of armored protection may partly explain the overwhelming Alan successes against the Parthian Empire in the 1st century AD. The Alan use of armor for their horse archers may have inspired the Sassanians to develop similar troops by the 3rd century AD.

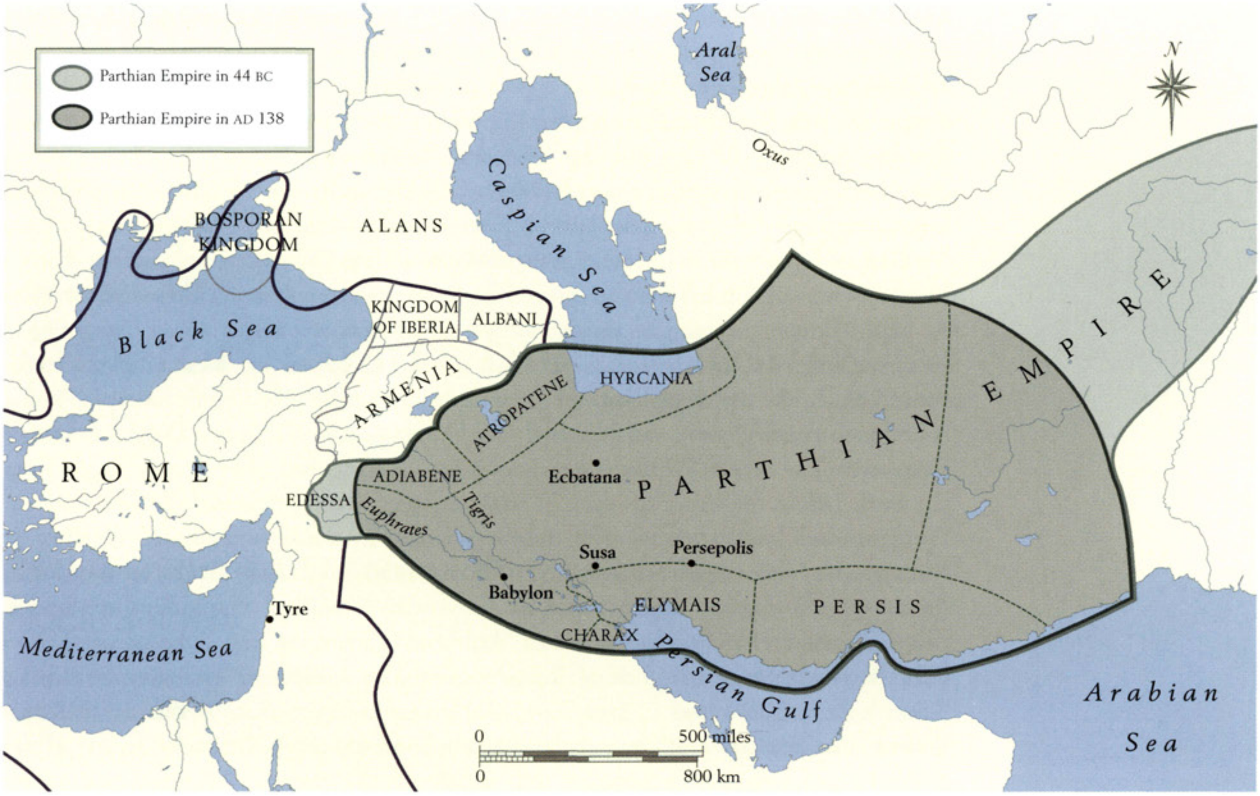
Parthian recovery and the enduring Alan legacy

Valaksh II (AD 77–80) succeeded his father Valaksh I. By this time, the Alan invasion force had spent itself, with groups retiring northwards laden with slaves and spoils of war. The Parthians regained control of the territory south of the Araxes River and Armenia also recovered. The Alan invasion, however, significantly altered the ethnic balance of Albania. This area had boasted a large Armenian and Kartvelian population to its west. However, the Alan influx now resulted in the introduction of northern Iranian languages alongside those spoken by the resident western Iranian (Pahlavi) speakers. Iranian languages became the main vernacular of the region until the Seljuk Turkish arrivals in the 11th century AD.[29]

The Iranians gradually came to refer to the Alans of western Iran as the Ard-Alan (the royal house of Alan). Interestingly, much of contemporary Iranian Kurdistan (known as Kordestan province) was recognized as the Ard-Alan district well into Islamic times. This is reminiscent of the ancient Medes of the 600s BC, who after fighting off an invasion by their Scythian kinsmen organized these as the Sak-Vand in modern-day Luristan. Like the Sakas before them, the Alans were to be rapidly absorbed into the mainstream culture of their ethnic cousins in Persia. This is reflected in the very strong legacy of the Alan arrivals, which still resonate in western Iran. The Kurdish epic *Sharaf-Nameh*, written originally in Persian by Kurdish Prince Sharraf-e-Din for the Safavid Shah of Persia Abbas II (r.1587–1629), vividly recalls the legends of the Alans in the romance of *Memi-Alan o Zhin-e-Bohtan* (lit. Memi the Alan and the Lady of Bohtan).

Groups of Alans settled in France and Visigothic Spain, where much of their martial legacy was passed onto the military aristocracies of those nations. By the time the Alans had joined the Vandals (Siling and Asding) and Sueves in the early 400s AD, Iranian-style equipment was becoming commonplace among the "barbarian" warriors of Europe. The Alans themselves seemed content at merging their culture with their fellow Indo-European Germanic speakers. Nickel notes that the "blending of the Iranian horseman culture and the Germanic system of mutual loyalty … resulted (in) the social phenomenon known as chivalry."[30] The Iranian plateau was in direct contact with Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe, with the northern Iranians acting as the vital "north–south" cultural link.

The Parthian Empire 44BC–AD 138


Parthian Empire in 44 BC
Parthian Empire in AD 138
Aral Sea
N
Oxus
Caspian Sea
ALANS
BOSPORAN KINGDOM
Black Sea
KINGDOM OF IBERIA
ALBANI
ARMENIA
ATROPATENE
HYRCANIA
PARTHIAN EMPIRE
ROME
EDESSA
ADIABENE
Ecbatana
Euphrates
Tigris
Susa
Persepolis
Babylon
Tyre
ELYMAIS
PERSIS
CHARAX
Persian Gulf
Mediterranean Sea
Arabian Sea
0
500 miles
0
800 km

Groups of northern Iranians merged with the incoming Slavic population as they had with the Germanic Ostrogoths. Sulimirski has identified a relatively large number of European geographical sites and cities having names of Iranian origin. The names of three major European peoples – the Serbs, Sorbs, and Croats – are now recognized as being of north Iranian Alanic origin.[31] The tribes of Alans who settled in ancient Poland exerted a profound influence on the local Slavic population. It is now acknowledged that the tamga-like heraldry of the Polish nobility owes much to a northern Iranian influence.[32] The sense of pride in their Alan origins led much of the Szlachta Polish nobility to adopt northern Iranian or "Tatar" costumes. As noted by Brzezinski and Mielczarek, many of the 17th-century Polish nobility called themselves Sarmatians.[33] There are many possible reasons for the Polish pride in a Sarmatian past, and Brzezinski and Mielczarek have recently suggested that "jealous of Western Europeans who could claim descent from the Romans, the Poles copied what they imagined was the armor of their Sarmatian ancestors."[34] Like the western Europeans influenced by a Greek and Roman military tradition, the Poles were influenced by a northern Iranian martial legacy, which was to have much in common with Parthian and Sassanian Iran.

Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 121–180) defeated the Iazyges Alans in Pannonia (Hungary), and exiled 5,000 of their cavalry to Britain in AD 175. They were settled in Chester, Ribchester, and at Hadrian's Wall. The Alans introduced Iranian mythology, Zoroastrian themes and legends into Celtic folklore.[35] The characters and themes of the King

Arthur legend have direct parallels in Alanic mythology. The gathering of the knights at a round table was seen among the Savaran knights of Sassanian Persia such as at the military conference conveyed to elect Bahram Chobin to combat the Turko-Hephthalite invasion in AD 588. Some themes of the Arthur legend are reflected in the upper panel of the Tagh-e-Bostan site near Kermanshah in Iranian Kurdistan – the water goddess of fertility Anahita (the lake goddess), the king with the "European" broadsword (Excalibur), and the supreme god Ahura Mazda dressed as a magus (Merlin). Northern Iranian legends and exploits have been commemorated in the post-Islamic *Shahname* epic of Firdowsi. Many elements of the "Arthurian" legends are to be found in the *Shahname,* such as Guiw (Gawain) and Kay-Kavoos (Kay). Sword worship has been an integral aspect of Iranian culture for thousands of years. At Tagh-e-Bostan, for example, there is a figure of Mithras or a magus who is "knighting" a Sassanian king. The Sassanian royal court had an official *shapsheraz,* or "he who brandishes the sword," much like the royal courts of later medieval Europe. The Dimili Kurds of Turkey continue to practice sword worship, while the Qaderi Kurds of Iran have dagger and sword ceremonies. The Persian Pahlavans were known for thrusting their *qameh* (Iranian dagger) into the earth before the onset of duels. There are other dramatic parallels between western European and Iranian motifs. The dragon standard in the illustrations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* or Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* are identical to the *simurgh* and dog-god motifs found in Zoroastrian Persia and among northern Iranian peoples. Finally, researchers have noted an "Arthurian" connection among the Yamato-Takeru (The Brave of Yamato) legends of Japan. As noted by Littleton, "The tales of Yamato-Takeru's … magical sword … bear a remarkable resemblance to King Arthur … these two heroes … and Batraz … all derive from the same ancient source…"[36]

Chapter 10

Emperor Trajan's bid to destroy Parthia

Parthia in the 2nd century: the rise of the feudal society

By the time of Trajan's invasion of the Parthian Empire in the 2nd century AD, the first "feudal society" in history had taken hold in Persia. The beginnings of this can be partly traced to the Azat lords of the early Medes and Persians infused with a strong Saka-Scythian element. The Parthians also assimilated the remaining Hellenic families in Persia, as well as the north Iranian Alans, into the aristocracy[1] and mainstream Iran.[2] As the Parthian Empire expanded, the Aryan nobles, especially the seven major clans of the House of Parthia, became very wealthy, partly due to the Empire's lucrative trade links. In times of war the securing of loot and booty was for the person of the king and all of his allies. This led to the rise of powerful nobles with large "feudal" estates, private armies, and peasants who worked the land. The feudal estates not only allowed for the revival of Achaemenid traditions, but the establishment of the Pahlavan culture in Persia.

One of the cultural legacies of the Parthian era was the *ayin* (custom) of the *Pahlavan* (Pahlav = Parthian). Traditions such as the banquet of warriors, the *Meezgerd-e-Savaran* (Knights of the Round Table), the hunt, the pursuit of *frahang* (intellect, culture, and noble conduct), and *leer* (martial prowess and battlefield performance) became known as the Pahlavan culture. The Pahlavan may be roughly translated from Pahlavi (Middle Persian) as being a man with conviction, courage, generosity, fairness, and mercy in battle, a powerful sense of camaraderie, strict obedience, high standards of culture and moral conduct, an obligation to protect the weak and helpless, and treat non-combatants with generosity.[3] The Parthian and later Sassanian knights were expected to embody the *rawan* (spirit) of the Pahlavan. By Sassanian times, the knight was to be steadfast in the religion of Zoroaster, exhibit utmost loyalty to the house of Sassan, and be a *peshmarg* (ready to sacrifice his life) for Eire-An (Persia). Physical skills such as horsemanship, archery, and *shamsher-wazig* (fencing) were constantly honed and improved with training.

The Pahlavan continues to be synonymous with "hero," "knight," and "champion" amongst the Kurds, Azeris, Persians, Afghans, Tajiks, and many peoples of the Caucasus.

By the 1st century BC, the feudal system of the Pahlavans was established throughout Persis, Media, and across the Iranian plateau to the borders of Central Asia.[4] By this time, the Achaemenid-style satrap had given way to the *shahrdar*[5] (provincial governor) and *shahryar*[6] (governor of a large province), the latter very much the equivalent of a local king. The shahryars (*shahryaran*) ruled their provinces in conjunction with the powerful azadan, who were practically autonomous from Ctesiphon. This prevented the formation of a strong central government, army, and administration, a factor that Rome was able to exploit with considerable success from the 2nd century AD until the end of Parthian rule. Each Roman victory diminished the prestige of the Parthian royal house, which concomitantly translated into an expansion of the power of the feudal lords. The succeeding Sassanian dynasty worked hard to curb the power of the feudal houses, and to introduce greater centralization, especially after the reforms of Kavad and Khosrow I. Nevertheless, the Pahlavan culture of the azadan nobles continued to evolve. This was matched by an immense growth in their wealth and estates, a factor which partly contributed to the "communist" doctrines of Mazdak in the late 5th and early 6th centuries AD.

Trajan's invasion

The plans for an invasion of Parthia had been publicly announced by Emperor Domitian (r. AD 81–96), yet these came to naught with his assassination. The dream of a Parthian adventure was to endure and crystallize in one of Domitian's officers: Trajan. Soon after becoming emperor, Trajan (r. AD 98–117) made preparations to invade Parthia with the aim of permanently altering the military balance in Mesopotamia in Rome's favor. The 50-year peace between Rome and Parthia was drawing to a close.

On the eve of Trajan's invasion, Parthia was in the midst of dynastic struggle, a factor that greatly aided Trajan's initial military successes. After Valaksh I's rule, Seleucia had witnessed at least three pretenders to the throne from AD 77–78 to 80–81. By the time Trajan invaded in 115, Parthia was probably under the "co-rulership" of Osrow (Osroes) I (r. 109–*c.*129), who was in control of Mesopotamia, and Valaksh III (r. 105–*c.*147). Thanks to ongoing petty rivalries within the House of Parthia, and the continued threat to the eastern realms, the Iranians would be unable to combine as one united force to beat back the Roman invasion.

Trajan's official *casus belli* was the Armenian question. Osrow had broken the tradition of consultation with Rome regarding the Armenian throne by unilaterally placing Axidares, a member of the House of Parthia, as King of Armenia.[7] Trajan made his displeasure clear in no uncertain terms, prompting Osrow to make every effort at averting a Roman invasion. As Trajan was making preparations for his offensives in Athens, Osrow sent emissaries stating his intentions of maintaining the peace with Rome. Osrow also sought Trajan's agreement over his choice of Parthamasiris, most likely a son of Pacorus II, for the Armenian throne. Trajan simply ignored all of Osrow's peace overtures and the Parthian embassy returned to Ctesiphon.[8] The rejection of the Parthian embassy is not altogether surprising as the "Armenian question" was simply a front for Trajan's objectives. First, he realized that Roman control of the entire

Mesopotamian arena and the Caucasus would finally enable a major thrust into the Iranian heartland towards Central Asia and India. This viewpoint is disputed on the basis that Trajan's construction of roads and bases were limited to the Syrian border and northern Mesopotamia.[9] These, however, could have just as easily been intended as staging posts for deeper thrusts into Mesopotamia and Iran, which already had a sophisticated road system in place since Achaemenid times. Second, successful territorial expansion at Parthian expense could have an economic advantage.[10] The Parthians had always placed heavy duties on Chinese and Indian goods bound for Rome, but Roman control of the east–west trade routes through Iran would end this.[11] Rome had already annexed Nabataea by 106, a strategic move which asserted Roman control over a vital western station of the trade routes.[12] A final factor was Trajan's passion for "... Alexander, to whose spirit he offered sacrifice..."[13] He seems to have been determined to succeed where Crassus and Mark Antony had failed: he, too, strived to "emulate Alexander and conquer the whole of Asia."[14]

It was in 114 that Trajan crossed into Armenia, where he encountered virtually no resistance. Prince Parthamasiris was greeted by Trajan and his army at Elgia.[15] In total contempt for Parthamasiris and the House of Parthia, Trajan officially declared that he was annexing Armenia as a Roman province. A Roman governor was now placed in Armenia. Interestingly, Parthamasiris soon died in mysterious circumstances, probably murdered on the orders of Trajan. Trajan now thrust southeast towards northern Mesopotamia and from here retired to Antioch by 115.[16] During this phase of the campaign, Trajan had carved out another Roman province by the name of "Mesopotamia." At Antioch, Trajan and his generals made their preparations for the invasion of the Parthian Empire. There were three possible routes that Trajan could choose to deploy from Antioch to Ctesiphon.[17] The route he chose went to Hatra, then crossed the Tigris, and then resembled Alexander's march towards Arbela. To do this, he

Emperor Trajan led a very successful invasion of Parthia in AD 115–116. Although Parthia survived, the invasion marked a steady decline of Parthian military and political power in relation to Rome. Statue, Glypotek Museum, Copenhagen. (G. T. Garvey, Ancient Art and Architecture) had to capture Hatra and Dura Europus, and his military engineers also had to solve the problem of crossing the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Parallels have been drawn between the tactical situation faced by Roman military planners in the Tigris crossing and the Soviet Union's attempt to cross the River Elbe in 1944: both depended on effectively suppressing opposition whilst rapidly bridging the obstacle.

The battles of the Tigris: Trajan's decisive blow

To achieve the river crossings in Mesopotamia, Trajan deployed moored ships laden with archers to provide a withering volley of missiles against the Parthians encamped on the opposite bank. The effects of Parthian archery may have been neutralized by the fortress-like protection on the Roman ships' hulls. The unarmored Parthian horse archers were certainly vulnerable to Roman archery, while the Romans benefited from the shielding of their ships. The ships probably had large stores of arrows, which would have allowed Roman archery to maintain a steady and uninterrupted rate of missile delivery. It is likely that the ship-decks gave the Roman archers a higher platform than their Parthian counterparts, but whether height elevation further facilitated Roman archery at the Tigris has yet to be substantiated by further research.

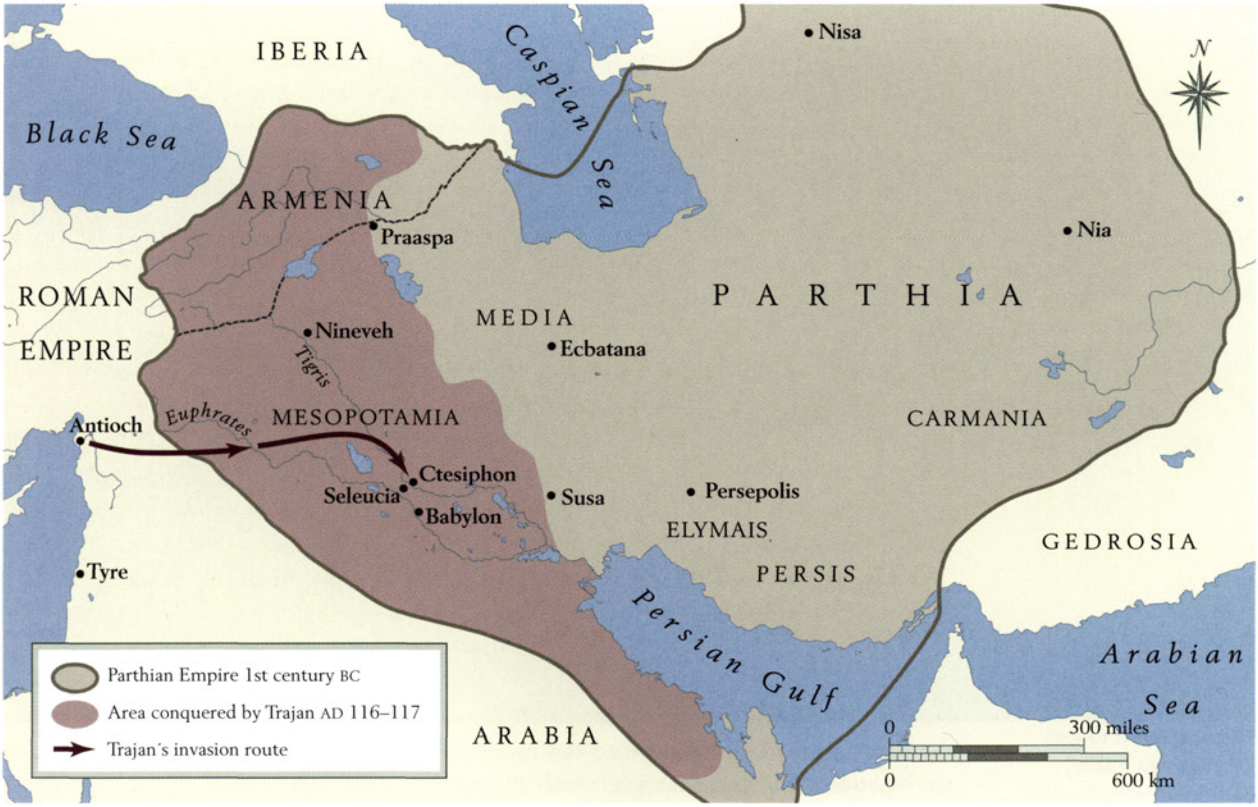
Although the efficacy of Roman archery against Iranian heavy armored cavalry has not been precisely determined, it is possible that Trajan's use of missile engines was at least partly intended to shatter the armor of the Parthian heavy cavalry. Roman siege engines could deliver missiles with great momentum, and their lack of precise accuracy would not have limited their efficiency against a formation. So it is possible that close-formation Parthian lance thrusts against Roman engineering teams were at least partly shattered by Trajan's missile engines. Trajan's campaign is notable in the successful use of archery by the Romans. Trajan's column in Rome depicts what appear to be mercenary horse archers as well as foot archers of the Cohors Sagittariorum. It would appear that by the onset of the Trajan campaign, the Romans had become fully aware of the efficacy of archery as a battlefield missile support arm.

Trajan managed to use his fleet in both the Euphrates and Tigris crossings with an amazing engineering feat. Once the Euphrates was crossed, Roman military engineers transported the flotilla overland on specially designed rollers. The ships were then launched onto the Tigris, a testament to the exemplary state of Greco-Roman ingenuity.[18]

By 116 Trajan's legions had crossed the Euphrates. Adiabene soon fell to Trajan, who expelled its King Mebarsapes, and annexed his territory as a Roman province named "Assyria." This was a dangerous setback for the Parthians, as a Roman force could now rapidly wheel southwards into the flat plains of Central Mesopotamia. The Parthian position now unraveled dramatically. The entire basin of the Tigris-Euphrates fell to Trajan soon after the acquisition of Adiabene.[19] This was consistent with Trajan's objective of striking at the heart of the Parthian Empire, by forcing a crossing of the Tigris River in order to capture the Parthian capital Ctesiphon. For this endeavor Trajan assembled a force of eight legions.

The Parthian defense against Trajan seems to have been a scorched-earth policy. Motofi notes that the Parthians methodically destroyed all potential sources of supplies and water wells as they retreated before Trajan.[20] This forced Trajan to rely primarily on his supply lines, which became more stretched as the Romans advanced deeper into Mesopotamia.

Trajan's campaigns


IBERIA
Caspian Sea
Nisa
N
Black Sea
ARMENIA
Praaspa
Nia
ROMAN EMPIRE
PARTHIA
MEDIA
Nineveh
Ecbatana
Tigris
Antioch
Euphrates
MESOPOTAMIA
CARMANIA
Ctesiphon
Seleucia
Babylon
Susa
Persepolis
ELYMAIS
GEDROSIA
Tyre
PERSIS
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
ARABIA
Parthian Empire 1st century BC
Area conquered by Trajan AD 116–117
Trajan's invasion route
0
300 miles
0
600 km

The specific tactics of the Parthian cavalry in this war are not clear, but it is possible that they resembled the guerrilla tactics of the Sassanian elite cavalry used against Julian during his invasion of Sassanian Persia in 363.[21] The Parthians may have adopted a "hit and run" approach, as Trajan advanced. Strikes may have been directed against targets of opportunity such as exposed and overstretched supply lines.

The Romans displayed highly innovative tactics such as using feints to confuse the Parthians on the battlefield. Trajan's tactics not only led to the capture of Ctesiphon, but also that of Osrow's daughter and the golden throne of Parthia.[22] The fall of Ctesiphon was accompanied by the occupation of the cities of Agra, Borsippa, Dura Europus, Mesene, and Seleucia across the Tigris. The east–west trade routes that traversed the Iranian and Mesopotamian lands were now under Roman control. The scale of these defeats was catastrophic for the Parthian Empire. Not only had much territory been lost and the economy severely disrupted, but imperial prestige had also taken a heavy blow, raising questions as to the dynasty's ability to safeguard the Empire's territorial and political integrity.

In imitation of Alexander the Great, Trajan marched south and reached the Persian Gulf. Spasinu Charax was occupied, and Trajan symbolically witnessed the launching of a ship towards India from the Persian Gulf coast. Trajan adopted the name "Parthicus" and ordered statues and reliefs be struck in commemoration of his Parthian success. Believing his conquest of Persia as final, Trajan confidently installed Parthamaspates as Rome's puppet ruler at Ctesiphon in 116.

OPPOSITE Aerial view of Palmyra in modern Syria. Palmyra became a prosperous and powerful commercial center situated between the Greco-Roman and Iranian worlds during the Parthian era, due to its control of trade routes. In AD 138, Palmyrene delegates circumvented the waning power of Ctesiphon and negotiated a trade route with Elam. As the Parthian ability to enforce even a nominal unity on Iran gradually decreased, Palmyra was able to reap the benefits of the Silk Route trade. Rome gained a modicum of control by finally annexing Dura Europus. However, Palmyra maintained her semi-independent status. It was only in 270 that the kingdom under Queen Zenobia was finally destroyed by the Romans. The city combined both Greco-Roman and the Persepolis styles in its architecture. The Palmyrans also developed an effective cavalry force based on Iranian models. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge)

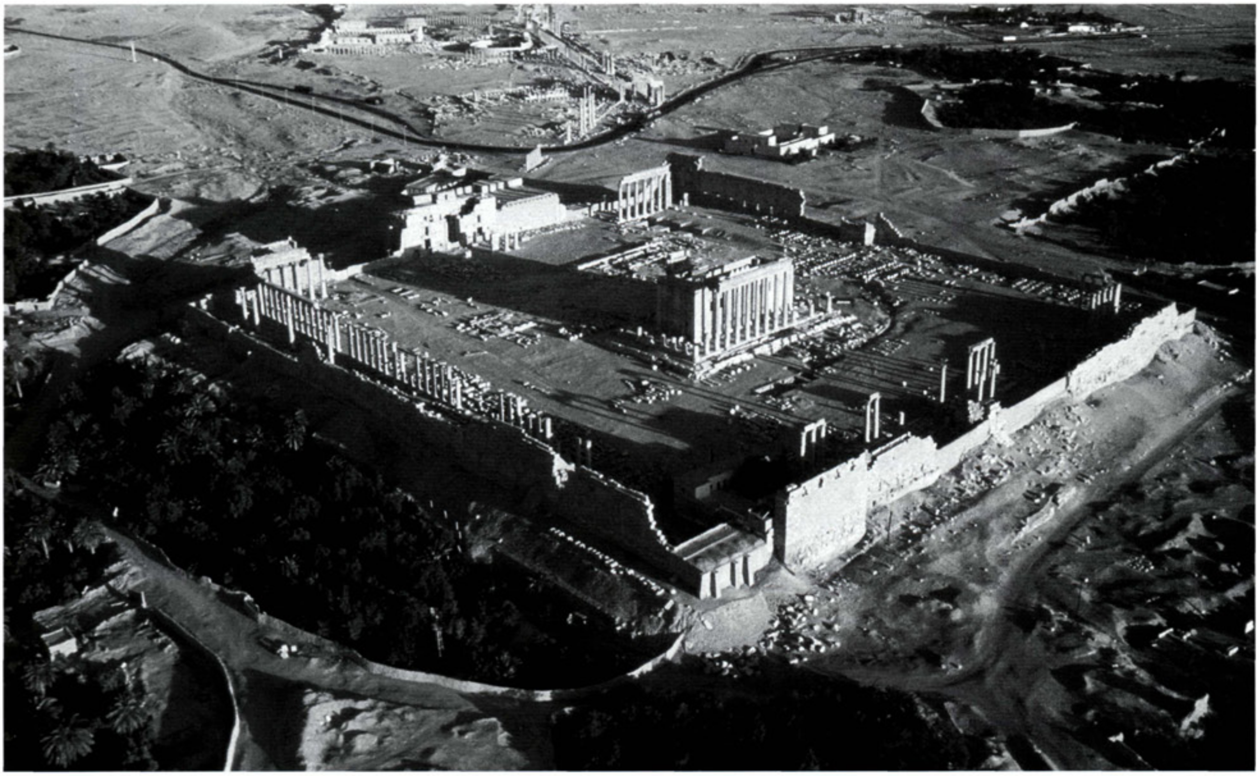
Osrow strikes back: a partial Parthian recovery

Trajan's celebrations proved premature, as his dramatic successes were more apparent than real. The Romans soon faced revolts in Armenia and much of Mesopotamia, especially Babylon, Edessa, and Assyria; Hatra had not been captured. Trajan's success at securing large tracts of territory and capturing the capital belied the fact that the core of the Parthian military machine was still intact. The permanence of Roman conquests depended on the total destruction of the Parthian cavalry. Although Trajan was overwhelmingly successful at Ctesiphon, he had failed to destroy Osrow's cavalry, who had simply retired to reorganize and counterattack at a later time of Osrow's own choosing. Trajan was to pay dearly for his illusion of victory. By the latter part of 116, Osrow had reorganized his forces thanks to a temporary suspension of Parthian internecine conflicts. The Romans, though overwhelmingly successful, were still vulnerable to well-coordinated lance chargers supported by horse archery. It is possible that fresh contingents of Saka horse archers were now bought to reinforce the depleted ranks of the army in the west. The Parthians counterattacked just as Trajan was at the apex of his success and engaged in the ceremonial emulation of Alexander. Osrow ejected Roman forces from Babylon, and forced Trajan to retreat northwards to Assyria in Adiabene.[23] Trajan's legions also failed dramatically at Hatra, despite making a breach in the city's formidable defenses.[24] The tired Roman legions reluctantly retired to Antioch. It is also possible that Jewish revolts in Palestine may have forced the diversion of some Roman military resources. Trajan did make preparations for another invasion of Parthia a year later, but these came to naught with his sudden death in 117. By that time, the Parthians had virtually wiped out much of Trajan's earlier territorial gains, although the exact extent of Roman withdrawals cannot be precisely ascertained. Trajan's campaign had been a partial military success, as the Parthians had not been conquered. This was duly symbolized by Osrow's ejection of Trajan's client, Parthamaspates, from Ctesiphon. The Parthians, however, failed to recover the strategic areas of Adiabene (Assyria) and Dura Europus in Syria, which were to remain in Roman hands.[25] Roman retention of those sites made the Parthians vulnerable to future invasions.

The aftermath: Rome gains the advantage

After the Parthian counterstrikes Emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138) approached Osrow with offers of negotiation. Rome handed back to Osrow some of those territories that the Romans still possessed, although Adiabene and Dura Europus were retained for strategic reasons. Hadrian symbolically retracted Trajan's arrogant proclamation at Elgia by agreeing to have a Parthian sit on the throne of Armenia. Osrow's daughter was also returned to him from Roman captivity.

Despite the elimination of much of Trajan's spectacular conquests, the campaign did achieve significant gains for Rome. The first was the establishment of a Roman presence in northern Mesopotamia, which Rome managed to retain in the face of the Parthian counteroffensive. Rome reorganized northern Mesopotamia in an anti-Parthian fashion. Much of modern-day Iraqi Kurdistan was administered into a Romanized version of "Assyria," composed of ancient Adiabene and possibly Gaugamela, Nineveh, Arbela, Kirkuk, and Olbia.[26] This left Parthia strategically vulnerable in any future



confrontation, as Rome was now able to militarily project itself into Atropatene (Azerbaijan), Albania (Republic of Azerbaijan), and southern Mesopotamia. The Romans were now confident of their ability to attack Parthia at any opportune time. Ctesiphon was to fall twice more to the armies of Rome before the overthrow of the Parthians in the early 3rd century AD. Rome also gained significant influence in Armenia; however, the local ruler remained a member of the House of Parthia.

One of the most important consequences of Hadrian's policies was the abandonment of Trajan's strategy of annexing buffer states bordering Parthia. This allowed for the rise of small and independent kingdoms, which significantly increased trade along the Mesopotamia–Syria routes.[27] It was the desert kingdom of Palmyra and cities such as Dura Europus who gained most from the east–west trade at this time.

Hadrian's magnanimous gestures and negotiations bore fruit, as the two empires were to enjoy relatively peaceful relations for the following 50 years. Parthian power never fully recovered after the Trajan wars. The declining dynasty was finally overthrown over a century later at the hands of the Sassanians, who would prove to be far more dangerous to the Romans than Parthia ever had been.

Chapter 11

The decline and fall of Parthia

The Valaksh Wars

Valaksh IV (Vologases) (r. 147–191) succeeded to the throne by 147. He had a keen interest in Armenia and was tempted to intervene. However, he was dissuaded from doing so as a result of strongly worded Roman threats backed up by military reinforcements in Syria. The Parthians were still determined to reduce Roman influence in Armenia, which had had a pro-Roman ruler since 140.[1] Meanwhile, the Parthians had failed to regain their authority in Hyrcania. Like the Kushans, the Hyrcanians' anti-Parthian attitude was vividly expressed by their dispatch of embassies to both Hadrian[2] and Antoninus Pius.[3] The Romans, however, had no interest in igniting another war.

The relative peace was to change abruptly in 162, when Armenia again became a focus of Roman and Parthian disputes. Sohaemus, an Edessian prince and Roman senator, now claimed the vacant Armenian throne. Valaksh IV sent his cavalry led by General Osrow into Armenia. Osrow surrounded the Roman force, and nearly annihilated it. Having ejected Sohaemus and captured Armenia, Valaksh placed a Parthian (Pacorus) on the throne. A Roman army led by Severianus (the Cappadocian governor) into Armenia was crushed by the Parthian cavalry at Elgia.[4] With Armenia secured, the Parthians now turned towards Syria and Cappadocia and decisively defeated the Roman forces in both theaters. The Parthian cavalry were received as liberators by the local Syriac and Jewish populations, who harbored bitter resentment against the Romans. Jewish writings of the period even praise the Parthian cavalry as harbingers of the Hebrew Messiah. This was the first appearance of Iranian cavalry in Syria for nearly two hundred years. The important fortress-city of Edessa also fell into Parthian hands. Nevertheless, the Parthian cavalry had not been fighting first-rate Roman troops. Parthian military successes were largely due to the decrepit state of Roman forces in the east.

The Romans were obliged to launch a new war to recover their influence in the Caucasus. Their response soon materialized in the person of Lucius Verus (130–169) the co-emperor of Marcus Aurelius. Verus realized that his eastern legions were in a sorry state and poorly prepared to meet the Parthians in battle. The Roman troops were put through a vigorous regimen of training and exercise, much as Corbulo had been obliged to do with his troops nearly a hundred years before. To compensate for the heavy battlefield losses of the earlier Parthian attacks, the Romans drew upon their European

Captive Parthians on the triumph arch of Septimius Severus in the Forum Romanum, Rome, which was erected in AD 203 to mark the tenth anniversary of his coronation. Septimius Severus crushed Pescennius Niger's unsuccessful coup in AD 195–196, which was supported by Valaksh V of Parthia. Severus then successfully attacked Parthia in AD 198 and captured Ctesiphon. (akg-images/Tristan Lafranchis)

contingents based on the northern Rhine and Danube rivers. Verus dispatched General Statius Priscus to strike into Armenia in 163, decisively defeating the Parthian forces there and capturing the capital Artaxata.[5] The Romans deposed Pacorus and reinstalled Sohaemus as their client in Armenia.

The success in the Caucasus allowed the Romans to concentrate against Mesopotamia. In 164, Mesopotamia was subjected to a powerful three-pronged assault by General Gaius Avidius Cassius. The decisive engagement occurred at Dura Europus in Syria. The battle was deadly and hard-fought, as the Parthians realized that a defeat at Dura Europus would allow Roman forces to break into Mesopotamia. The Roman victory at Dura Europus did allow Rome to penetrate into the Mesopotamian heartland. Avidius Cassius then engaged and destroyed a Parthian army near Seleucia. This led to the capture of Seleucia, with Babylon falling shortly afterwards. Dura Europus remained under Roman occupation until its capture by Shapur I of the Sassanian dynasty.

The real disaster, however, was yet to come. In 164, Ctesiphon was captured for the second time by Roman troops. The Parthians also suffered the indignity of watching the Romans loot the city and burn down the palace of Valaksh IV. Natural factors now came to Parthia's rescue: a severe plague in Seleucia soon spread throughout Roman forces and forced them to withdraw by 165. The haste of the withdrawal obliged the Romans to abandon much of their captured booty and territorial gains in the process. Many Roman troops perished during the march away from the Parthian Empire; many of the survivors spread the sickness throughout Europe. The plague decimated the Parthian realms as well, greatly diminishing the sense of relief bought about by the Roman withdrawal.

Verus did return to campaign against Parthia, where he appears to have made penetrations as far as Media, but the Romans again proved unable to hold onto their gains. Nevertheless, despite the withdrawal, the Romans had the foresight to retain many of their possessions in northern Mesopotamia.

By the 170s, a sort of status quo had returned to the frontier. Despite Valaksh IV's threats to launch a war around 175, he did not support Avidius Cassius in his revolt against Marcus Aurelius. Valaksh's restraint won the appreciation of Marcus Aurelius, who soon negotiated a peace treaty. To that end, the Parthians did not contest Roman possession of the strategic regions of the Khabur River and the cities of Nisibis and Edessa. Sohaemus was also acknowledged as king of Armenia. The Roman position was not to be seriously challenged until the arrival of the Sassanian dynasty 50 years later. The Valaksh-Marcus Aurelius rapprochement bought peace to the frontier, one that was to endure throughout the reign of Marcus Aurelius' son, Commodus (r. 180–192).

Valaksh V: Parthian support of Pescennius Niger

Valaksh IV's successor, Valaksh V (r. 191–208), was eager to avenge the defeats suffered at the hands of Verus. However, an outright military confrontation against Rome was not feasible at the time. Instead, Valaksh V decided to support Pescennius Niger (135–195) against Septimius Severus (r. 193–211) in the contest for Rome in 193. Roman-ruled northern Mesopotamia revolted and supported Niger, which allowed Valaksh to enter the region and capture Adiabene, where he brutally murdered the pro-Roman ruler Narses by drowning him in the Zab-e-Bozorg River. Armenia also fell to the Parthians.[6] Valaksh's anti-Roman actions and involvement in internal Roman politics proved to be a disastrous gamble. Septimius Severus duly crushed Niger by 194. Severus now proceeded to move against the late Niger's Parthian allies. By 196, preparations for a counterstrike into the Parthian Empire were fully underway. Severus was initially successful, but soon had to withdraw to Europe to combat a serious revolt in Gaul. The Parthians took advantage of Severus' withdrawal and again made territorial gains. However, the Romans were able to maintain their possessions in Khabur and the Sinjara mountains.

Despite fighting for the banner of a united Persia or Eire-An, the House of Parthia had now lost the support of many of their Iranian kinsmen. Like the Hyrcanians, the western Iranians were also dissatisfied with the House of Parthia. The Medes and the Persians[7] now united in revolt against the Parthians. This forced Valaksh to divert his cavalry from the Mesopotamian theater to suppress the insurrection. Despite the temporary suppression of the western Iranians, the Parthian military was unable to concentrate fully on the growing Roman threat now materializing again on its frontiers. These circumstances helped "soften up" the Parthians for the upcoming assaults of Severus.

By the spring of 198, Severus' preparations were complete. With specially constructed river vessels and fresh legions, the Romans made a determined thrust into Mesopotamia. The Parthians proved unable to prevent the Romans from advancing. Severus' forces now besieged Ctesiphon, which fell to Roman arms for a third time, forcing Valaksh to flee the capital. Predictably, the fall of Ctesiphon was followed by the capture of Seleucia and Babylon.[8] Much of Ctesiphon's treasury was emptied and carried off to Rome as war trophies. So great was the amount of wealth captured that it reputedly helped stave off a possible economic crisis in Europe for the next 30–40 years. If these estimates are true, the consequences for Parthia, already shaken by military defeat, must have been catastrophic. To the Hyrcanians and the western Iranians, these defeats only served to highlight the inability of the House of Parthia to safeguard the frontiers against Roman aggression.

Nevertheless, Severus was unable to translate his victories into a total conquest of Parthia. Hatra, the Arab-populated city in central Mesopotamia, had successfully defeated Severus' attempts to capture it in 198. Undeterred by this setback, Severus returned to

Hatra the next year and bought enough supplies to sustain a long siege. The Romans also bought powerful siege engines to force Hatra into submission. Despite Severus' thorough preparations, Hatra proved to be beyond his reach. Besieging Roman troops suffered losses as the defenders utilized a variety of weapons including flammable naphtha. The Hatrenes also successfully launched their Parthian-style cavalry against Roman troops, scouting parties, and siege engines. Hatrene counter-siege artillery also had devastating results: one salvo nearly struck the Emperor. Severus' experience was now beginning to resemble that of Mark Antony at Praaspa over 200 years before.

Finally, Severus' troops managed to force a breach at one of Hatra's walls. Just as the troops were about to storm the city, a quarrel seems to have broken out between the commanders and the ordinary troops. The net effect of this was a withdrawal of the troops from the breached section. This was adroitly exploited by the defenders, who rapidly repaired the breached section at night. The Romans had allowed this brief advantage to go to waste over petty disputes regarding war spoils. When Severus ordered his troops to renew their assault, he realized that his men were spent. The continental European troops simply did not advance, and the Syrian troops who complied with the order were severely mauled. At this juncture Severus realized that he was unable to maintain his posture in front of Hatra. His troops were exhausted, while the Hatrenes were intact, and the unpredictable Hatrene cavalry could emerge at any time to take advantage of the Roman disarray. Severus ordered a general withdrawal. The failure to capture Hatra meant that Roman gains were ephemeral: Severus' forces could not hold onto their Parthian territorial possessions indefinitely. This may have been part of the reason why Severus chose to vacate Ctesiphon and Seleucia. Hatra's resistance had given the battered Parthian forces precious time to reorganize and recover. The regions under Roman occupation were also bereft of supplies, possibly the result of a ruthless scorched earth policy by the Parthians. Once again, the political and military situation reverted to a sort of ante-bellum status, with the observation that the Parthians continued their steady decline.

The last battle: stalemate at Nisibis

Valaksh VI (r. 208–218) succeeded his father, Valaksh V, in 208, however, his brother Ardavan (Artabanus) V (r. 216–224), also claimed the Parthian throne. The result was a 16-year civil war, which further weakened the moral, political, economic, and military foundations of the Empire. The Parthian dynastic conflict presented another golden opportunity for the Romans. Emperor Caracalla (r. 211–217) asked for the hand of Ardavan's daughter in marriage, and when this was refused, Caracalla used it as a pretext to invade the Parthian Empire. Ardavan was in control of Media and the western Parthian Empire, and by 216, Caracalla had entered Parthia at the head of a large invasion force. Parthian disunity at the start of the invasion was a major factor in allowing Caracalla to reach Arbela in modern Iraqi Kurdistan. However, Ardavan and Valaksh suspended their hostilities and agreed to unify against the Romans. In the meantime, Caracalla had been assassinated by Macrianus, who continued his predecessor's policy of invading the Parthian Empire. In 217, Macrianus led a Roman force against Ardavan V at Nisibis.

By the latter part of the dynasty, the Parthians had introduced a new type of heavy cavalry: knights mounted on camels.[9] The camel is a powerful beast, perfectly capable of carrying the fully armored knight. The camel's elevated position certainly gave the archer a marked advantage. Motofi has questioned whether the cataphracts aboard the camels would have been Parthian, and has suggested that these were probably Arabs.[10] Parthian tactics, however, do not appear to have been significantly different from those of their predecessors at Carrhae in 53 BC. The Parthian cavalry assaults opened with the charge of horse and camel cataphracts against Roman lines. The charges caused significant Roman casualties, with the camel cataphracts being particularly deadly. The Parthian horse archers rode closely to the Roman lines and shot at them after each cataphract assault.

Macrianus formed his legions in the center. Lanes were left open to allow light infantry to deploy at the front or rear as dictated by the needs of the battlefield. Although the Romans struggled to maintain their lines, they did not collapse against the Parthian cataphracts. The Romans also discovered the means of blunting the formidable camel cataphracts. The camels' soft spongy feet made them highly vulnerable to the Roman *tribuli* (caltrops).[11] Macrianus had also placed his cavalry at both ends of the Roman lines. These intervened to prevent Parthian cavalry (cataphracts and horse archers) from outflanking and encircling the Roman forces. The horse archers were also countered by light infantry, Arabian light cavalry, and presumably, slingers. These countermeasures however, were insufficient to defeat the Parthians. On the third day of the battle, Ardavan ordered his cataphracts and horse archers to execute a much larger flank movement to finally envelop the Roman lines. Macrianus responded by extending his line to block Ardavan's flanking thrusts.

This last engagement appears to have obliged the Romans to reconsider their strategic situation. Two factors now threatened their position. First, Ardavan had been successful in forcing the Romans into a wholly defensive posture. The second factor was wholly practical, and a consequence of the first. If Macrianus continued to remain defensively transfixed at his post, Ardavan would eventually wear him down. Ardavan's strategy was to weaken the Roman lines with repeated assaults of cataphracts and mounted bowmen. The Roman lines could not hold out indefinitely and would eventually give way to Ardavan's final and fatal blow. Macrianus sued for a ceasefire with Ardavan, and agreed to pay an indemnity of five million denarii to the Parthians. This ended the final Roman attempt at subduing Parthian Persia. Ardavan himself was to fall before Sassanian rebels in the great joust battle at Hormozgan, just seven years later.

The House of Parthia: lost prestige

Irrespective of the success at Nisibis, the Parthian dynasty never recovered from the damaged prestige it had suffered as a result of the capture of Ctesiphon in 116, 164, and 198. While the Parthians had managed to contain the Romans and maintain the Empire's independence, it was becoming clear that Rome was increasingly gaining the upper hand politically and militarily. While Rome never managed to develop a military system for destroying the Parthians as they had the Celts and the Carthaginians, they still held the initiative in terms of being able to make deep penetrations into Parthian territory. The Parthians, in turn, relied on an increasingly defensive strategy vis-à-vis the Romans. The Parthian decline, however, was not only in the military and political domains. The cultural

The head of a gorgon above an Aramaic inscription on a wall in Hatra. The arts and architecture of Hatra provide evidence of a rich and vibrant culture combining Greek and Iranian elements into a unique synthesis. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge)

and economic development of the Parthians (in contrast to many other parts of Iran) was also entering stagnation. This is vividly demonstrated in the deteriorated quality of late Parthian coins. The older standards of craftsmanship, metallurgy, arts, and architecture had been preserved in places like Hatra, Hyrcania, and Persis. At Persis, the local kings not only issued coins that were superior to their nominal masters,[12] but also produced an artistic and architectural style that was, in certain respects, in advance of the Parthians.[13] But it was in the military sphere where the Parthians would be thoroughly outclassed by the rebels of Persis.

The Parthian brothers Ardavan V and Valaksh VI once again resumed their civil war. This distracted them from the rise of Ardashir I of Persis. Ardashir revolted in 220, with the aid of several other Parthian sub-kings. Valaksh was defeated in 222, but managed to escape until a final defeat in 229,[14] while his brother was defeated in three battles ending with his death in 224 or 226. The Kushans and the Armenians continued to support the Parthian cause even after the defeat of Ardavan V and Valaksh VI, and it was not until around 230 that the last Parthian resistance was crushed, thus ending a dynasty which had ruled for almost 500 years.

The mighty but forgotten legacy of the Parthians

Before its gradual decline after the Trajan conquests, Parthia had become a prosperous kingdom. The Parthians presided over an Iranian revival, one that was to have a profound impact in a number of domains, including the arts, commerce, architecture, and technical advancements. These developments also took place in a number of places in Iran that were virtually autonomous of the Parthians, such as Hyrcania.

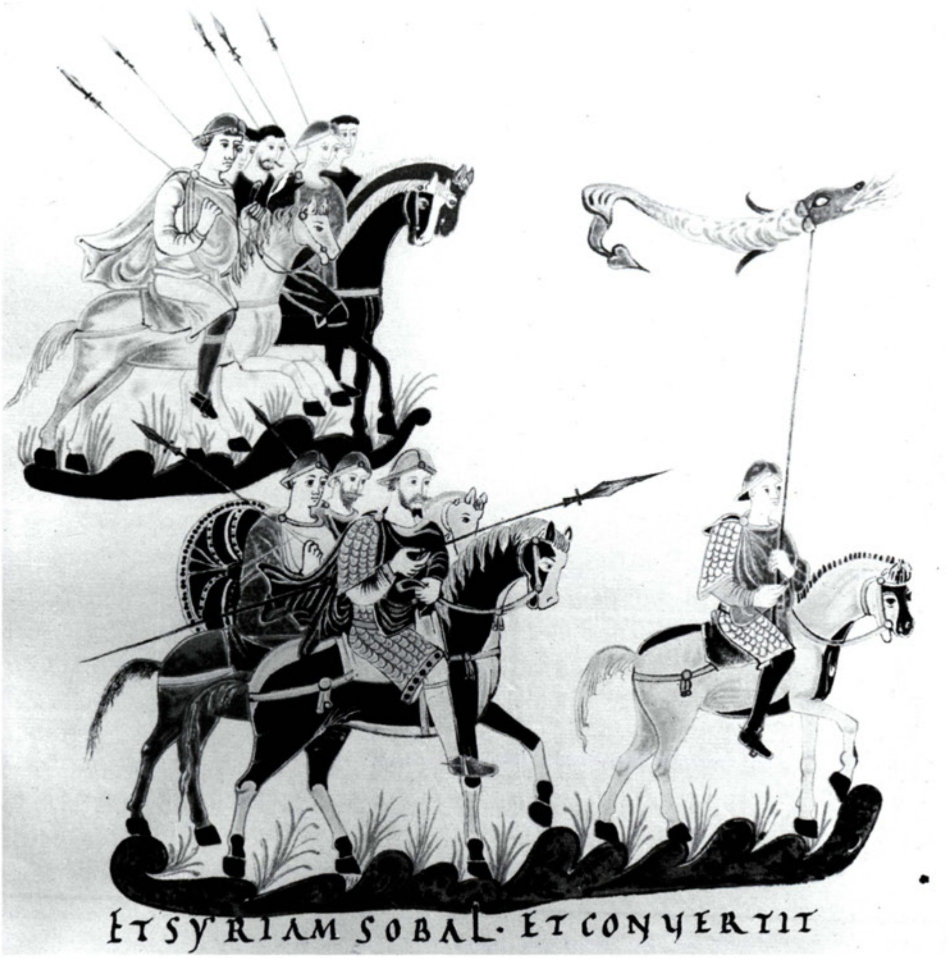
The linguistic legacy of the Parthians is very strong in Iran, and all nations and regions termed as "Iran exterior." The Iranian word for Parthian, "Pahla," is the root of the word "Pahlavi," the Persian language of Iran before the Arab conquests. Pahlavi itself appears to have diverged into a Parthian Pahlavi and a Sassanian Pahlavi by the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, or perhaps earlier. Parthian Pahlavi is still spoken by pockets of Zaza speakers in eastern Turkey. Sassanian Pahlavi is the direct ancestor of modern Persian (Parsee-Dari-e-Now). Kurdish Kurmanji dialects (Bahdenani and Sorani) appear to variously exhibit characteristics of both Parthian and Sassanian Pahlavi.

The spread of Iranian dress styles is an interesting case study of cultural transmission. At Hatra, nobles are depicted in Iranian poses such as the Zoroastrian salute (partly raised right hand), and Parthian costumes.[15] Busts and statues of noblewomen dressed in Iranian style are featured prominently in both Hatra and Palmyra.[16] Some of these styles survive to the present day: a portrait of Zenobia at Palmyra is remarkably similar to that worn by Kurdish women of the Qaderi clan of western Iran.[17] Remarkably, these dresses also reflect Greco-Roman influences.[18] Iranian male costume, namely the long-sleeved tunic and embroidered trousers, feature prominently in Palmyran and Hatrene arts, indicating the adoption of Iranian costume in Mesopotamia and Syria. Palmyra not only adopted much of the Iranian world's dress, arts and architecture, but also a Parthian-style cavalry tradition.[19] Dura Europus also bears a strong Iranian influence, notably with its portrayal of Parthian cavalry[20] and the portrait of Zoroaster.[21] The Pathans of modern Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to wear variations of Parthian dress, notably the *shelwar kameez*, perhaps first introduced with the early Parthian arrivals. The Persian-Parthian costume was also adopted by the Europeans: "[Iranian] costume was transmitted to the eastern German tribes by the Iranian Sarmatians and Alans, It was also adopted by the Roman army."[22] A Germanic warrior's belt-buckle of Iranian origin and inscribed with the Iranian name "Ardashir" in Pahlavi script has been found in Wolfsheim, Germany.[23] German overcoats and clothing began to strongly resemble Iranian clothes worn by the Sassanian warrior nobility and the Sarmatians: wide trousers and loose long tunics featuring colored embroidered motifs along the cuffs and hems, and the kandys first seen on the Persepolis depictions. Iranian-style *neshans* (coats of arms), also known as "tamgas," were adopted from the northern Iranians by the Germanic nobility, who used them to mark their horses.

The founding of Ctesiphon and the rise of the Silk Route

Parthia's ability to militarily pacify the northeast frontier finally allowed for the unhindered transition of goods from China into the Iranian plateau. The Parthians established close political and commercial links with the Chinese Han dynasty by the time of Mehrdad I. This resulted in the first true "Silk Route" between China and Persia through Central Asia. From the Iranian plateau, the Silk Route crossed into the Roman Near East and the Persian Gulf. The founding of Ctesiphon allowed for an Iranian nexus point for Silk Route goods to enter the Roman Near East. Seleucia and its talented Greek population were gradually absorbed with Ctesiphon into a major mega-metropolis in Sassanian times. This became an important center of arts, culture, architecture, and commerce, which was to profoundly influence European, Arabian, and Islamic civilizations. The recipient trading centers for Silk Route goods were city-states such as Palmyra, Hatra, and Petra. These "caravan" areas became very prosperous. Ironically, despite efforts at formalizing the Silk Route trade with China, Parthia was to exercise less and less control over the transit of goods from its territory to Rome, due to the rising power of the caravan centers.

The Silk Route not only transported goods, but also transmitted technologies and ideas. Thanks to the cultural and economic links between Persia and China, the Chinese emperor Han Wu-Ti (r. 141–87 BC) was aware of the effectiveness of the Parthian heavy cavalry, and obtained Parthian-Nisean horses from Ferghana. These horses were variously referred to as the sacred Tien-Ma (Celestial horse) and the Soulon (a mythical Chinese dragon). By the onset of the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 386–634) Chinese cavalrymen had not only fully incorporated the Nisean horse into their battle order, but had developed their own version of the Parthian shot.[24]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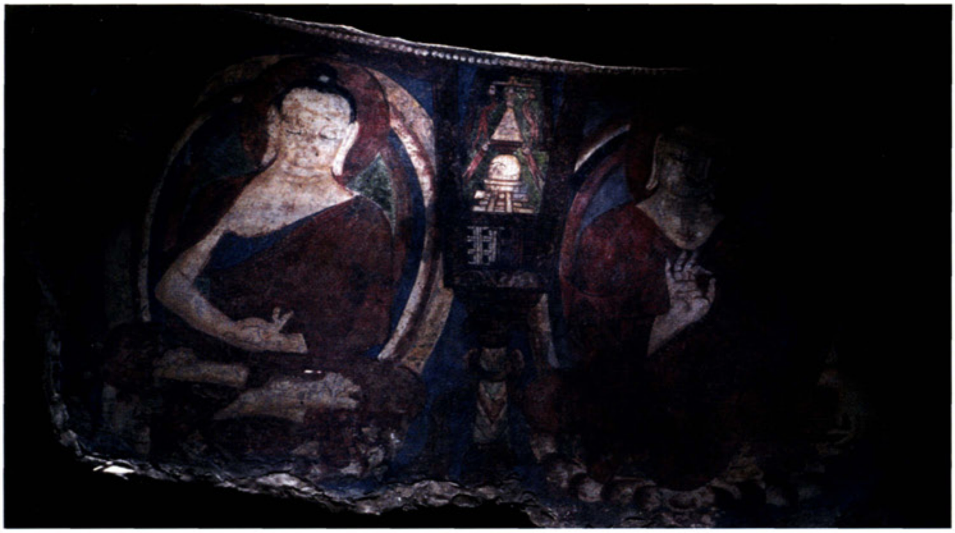
The 9th-century golden Psalter of St. Galen. Note the virtually identical appearance of the dragon-fish windsock to the Persepolis and north Iranian (Saka-Sarmatian) dragon motifs over a thousand years previously. Although the clothing and armor differs, the lance-bearing cavalry are reminiscent of the Savaran cavalry of Parthian and Sassanian Persia. (Roger-Viollet/Topfoto)

The largest statue of Buddha in Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan, which was destroyed in 2001 by the former Taliban government of Afghanistan. (Topfoto/HIP)

Parthian arts and architecture

Close examination of examples of early Parthian arts, notably rhytons, shows a unique synthesis of Greek anatomical realism and the "Persepolis" emphasis on fantastic beasts.[25] Although archeological finds of Parthian arts remain scant, enough has been uncovered, especially metalworks,[26] to indicate that these were not of the "imperial" style, so often seen in Achaemenid and later Sassanian arts.[27] In an overall sense, archeologists have generally concluded that the arts of Parthian Iran acted as a prelude to Sassanian arts, the latter exerting an influence far beyond its era and domains.

The dragonhead motif was a powerful symbol amongst all Iranian peoples, widely used by the Parthians and Sassanians of Persia as well as the Sarmatian peoples encountered by the Romans in Eastern Europe. The Iranian peoples attached a windsock to the dragon-head, much as the Parthians used horsehair standards to gauge the direction of wind to coordinate their archery. The Romans adopted the Iranian-style dragon-head from the Sarmatians, particularly the Alans.[28] The Iranian (Partho-Sassanian or north Iranian) *azhdaha* (dragon) heads could be fashioned in the shape of birds, canines and even fish, but these would usually be of the "Persepolis" type featuring a mythological *homa*



Buddhist fresco from the caves of Bamiyan, with notable Persian iconographic influence. Bamiyan is in modern Afghanistan, but the area was part of the ancient Persian empire. (Dr Volker Thewalt)

(dragon-bird-lion) creature.[29] The Sassanian style *senmurv* (wolf-bird) motif was also evident among the Alans who bought these to Europe.[30] The homa and senmurv motifs were modified from their original "eastern" appearance. However, the fundamental artistic themes remained consistent in Europe across the Roman and post-Roman eras. The Draco standard "continued in use much later in the Caucasus and medieval Georgia. In Western Europe they were adopted by the Franks under Charlemagne. On the Bayeux tapestry, held by King Harold Godwinsson's standard-bearer, is perhaps the most famous of all Draco standards – the Dragon of Wessex."[31] Another example of the azhdaha motif is evident in the Golden Psalter (in Stiftsbibliotek, St. Galen, p.171) depicting the mounted standard-bearer leading knights with lances.[32]

Interestingly, much of the Parthian architecture that has survived to this day is outside the political realm of the late Parthian era. The principality of Hatra was allied to the Parthians and was practically autonomous, while Palmyra was totally independent of Ctesiphon. Each bears a unique Aramaic stamp of its own, whilst also displaying an Iranian influence. One example is a portrait of Palmyran soldiers with small shields lined up in the style of the Apadana at Persepolis, but facing the front, in the Parthian style.[33] The overall design of the city betrays Greek influence, alongside the grand "imperial" Achaemenid style, which is reminiscent of the earlier palaces of Persepolis.[34]

Parthian artistic and architectural contributions in western Iran include the "frontal" style,[35] as well as new techniques of brick-laying and construction,[36] domed vaults,[37] innovative stucco decorations,[38] and the revolutionary *iwan* construction.[39] The iwan was a new type of chamber that was barrel-vaulted and open-fronted on at least one side of a courtyard.[40] The iwan-vault system "replaced the archaic Greek Megaron type of Hall where two columns were placed in the portico."[41] There was also a key difference in the way Greeks and Parthians utilized columns. The pillar was fundamental to the structure of Greek buildings, whereas Parthian pillars were decorative.[42] Other centers of architecture are found in the eastern Iranian world, especially in places of Parthian settlement such as Kuh-e-Khwaja in Seistan and Nisa in modern Turkmenistan. These regions were in contact with the Kushan Buddhist arts that combined Greek, Iranian, and

Indian styles into its own unique form, known as the Ghandhar School.[43] The ancient Parthian capital at Hecatompylos in Hyrcania (modern Gurgan-Mazandran) was fundamental to the arts of the Sassanian and post-Sassanian periods. Closer to home in Media (Qaleh Yazdegerd), Media Atropatene (Shiz), and Elam (Bard-e-Neshandeh), the proto-Sassanian styles of arts were being developed, especially in mythological and coat-of-arm motifs. One example is the evolution of the homa-gryphon and dog-god motifs of Persepolis into the Sassanian-style senmurv beast of benevolence. The senmurv was to later appear in the arts of western Europe, Islam, and the Caucasus.

Parthian advances in military architecture

Although the Parthians never developed the doctrines or equipment necessary for siege warfare, they did pioneer an impressive array of military architectural designs, which laid the foundations of the later Sassanian fortress systems. The Parthians put considerable resources into building their fortresses.[44] Many of these forts appear to have been distributed along the vast Central Asian frontier in an endeavor to contain nomadic invaders from the northeast. The fortresses of the Caucasus frontier and the critical Mesopotamian theater were of prime importance due to the threats posed mainly by Roman troops.

Parthian fortress-cities were built to house three major elements, the *Kohandezh, Sharestan,* and *Savad*.[45] The Kohandezh were the quarters of the leadership, nobility, and the king. This section was usually placed in an elevated position, or built on top of a hill. The objective was to maximize the field of vision towards the surrounding areas as well as within the fortress-city itself. The Kohandezh was also a "fortress within a fortress" in that it was built to withstand attacks if the other sections of the fortress were to fall to besieging troops. The second section, the Sharestan, was the quarters of the knights, petty nobility, and men of learning. The third section, the Savad, was reserved for the farmers and craftsmen.

There were a number of ways in which the tri-partite system was implemented. One innovation was to house this system within a circular fortress design.[46] Roman Ghirshman has succinctly summarized the design philosophy of Parthian circular fortifications by observing that:

> In the design of cities, the Parthians continually considered the factor of defense against enemy assaults. This is because the cities had to not only contend with the attacks of foreign troops [i.e. Romans] but also those of rival feudals and opponents of the Parthian kings … it was this reason that led the Parthians to pay close attention to the buildings/fortifications of their cities … the design of cities involved the robust circular design which was very efficient at defending against flank attacks…[47]

The concept of the circular design can be traced to the nomadic Central Asian origins of the Parthians,[48] who appear to have depended on a circular system of defense against attacking nomadic horsemen. The circular design was further developed by the succeeding Sassanian dynasty. One of Ardashir I's places at Firuzabad features such a design, with a very efficient internal architectural layout. The Parthians also laid the basis for the circular design of the defenses of the capital Ctesiphon, which was to become far more formidable during the succeeding Sassanian dynasty. The building of Ctesiphon was also partly indebted to ancient Assyrian methods of fortress construction.[49]

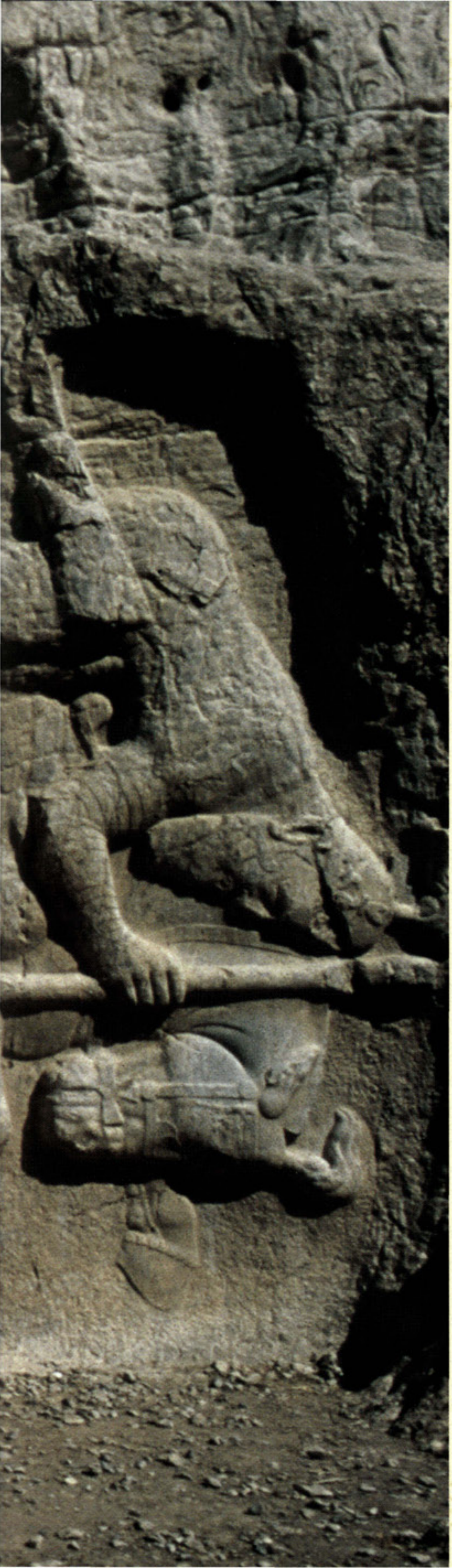
One of the most formidable cities fortified during the Parthian era was Nisibis. The Parthians and the later Sassanians placed particular importance on Nisibis due to its sensitive strategic location. The city was to change hands several times during the long wars between the Partho-Sassanian dynasties of Iran and the Romans. The walls and towers of Nisibis were gradually strengthened by large and highly resilient bricks. A very large ditch was dug around the city, obliging all ingress and egress to take place by means of mobile bridges that would extend from the city's gates to the opposite banks of the ditch.[50] There was also a rectangular system of fortress buildings, as seen in the original Parthian foundations at Merv and Shiz.[51] These were considerably improved in terms of design and resilience against sieges during the ensuing Sassanian era.

Parthian industry and technology

Parthian military technology produced excellent armor. This was a testament to the advanced state of the iron industry in Iran at the time. Much of this technology bore a strong relationship to Central Asia. Historians have, in general, acknowledged the tradition of iron-working within Iran and Iran l'exterieur. The scales of armor reported by Pompeius and Plutarch, for example, are described as having been made of "Margian steel," leading many researchers to believe that the entire process of production took place in Merv. Archeological excavations have unearthed evidence of advanced metallurgy in Merv, yet this does not rule out the long-standing relationship and technological cooperation that already existed between the Iranian plateau and the region. The Parthians had access to the long-standing traditions of iron-working and weapons construction in western Iran (i.e. Luristan, Media Atropatene). Persia was an established civilization, which was already in possession of ironwork technology.

The trade routes that crossed the Empire allowed for the free flow of technology. Margiana was certainly one of those centers that already existed within the Empire. Parthian scale armor was to remain in production throughout the dynasty, as seen in surviving artifacts, and possibly in the Dura Europus drawings. The Kushans of Central Asia and modern Afghanistan also wore scale armor resembling Parthian models. The quality of Parthian steel is attested to by Classical sources who state that "of all varieties of iron, the palm goes to the Seric, sent us by the Seres with their fabrics and skins, the second prize goes to Parthian iron; and indeed no other kinds of iron are forged from pure metal..."[52]

A common misconception about the Parthians is that they lacked interest in the development of learning, science, and technology. This belief is derived from the paucity of the available evidence, the lack of archeological studies, as well as subjective bias. Technology certainly continued to evolve during Parthian rule. A dramatic discovery in a tomb by German archeologist Wilhelm Konig at Khujut Rabu (near modern Baghdad in Iraq) in 1936 was two near-intact jars dated to the Parthian dynasty, which are possibly the world's oldest batteries. Inside the clay jar was an iron cylinder surrounded by a cylinder of copper.[53] Scientific tests revealed that when the jar of the battery was filled with vinegar (or other electrolytes), it was capable of generating between 1.5-2.0 volts. Not all historians accept Konig's 1940 report that the items were "batteries," but it is generally agreed that the "batteries" were used to electroplate items. This technique is still seen in many traditional metalworking shops of Iran today. If the jars were indeed "batteries" in the modern sense, then Count Alassandro Volta's invention of the modern battery may have been predated by 1,600 years or more.



Part 3

The Sassanians

The Sassanian era witnessed vast strides in architecture, learning, the arts, and militaria, especially in the development of specialized heavy cavalry. The religion of the empire was Zoroastrianism, although the empire also included large populations of other religions. The Sassanians fought against enemies to the east and west, yet even following the Arab conquest of the empire in the 7th century AD, Sassanian cultural and military achievements left a profound legacy on civilizations around the world.

Chapter 12

The rise of the Sassanian Dynasty

The House of Sassan

Tracing the origins of the Sassanians is challenging, as accounts in the Shapur inscriptions and Agathias are not entirely consistent with each other. Ardashir I (r. AD 224–241), the founder of the Sassanian Empire, was born in the village of Tirdeh, Persis, in 180. He was the son of Babak (Papak or Papag) and Princess Rodak[1] of the Shabankareh tribe of possible Kurdish origin, located in Persis at the time.[2] An interesting letter by Ardavan V refers to Ardashir's lineage as "Kurd … raised by the Shaban…"[3] Ardashir's success in receiving the support of the Medes and the Kurds in his revolt against the Parthians may have been partly due to his own possible heritage as a highlander.[4] Interestingly, while Babak's mother, Denak, is mentioned, no actual family connection to a certain Sassan is specified.[5] The historical Sassan is generally agreed to have been the chief *mobad* (magus – priest) of the Temple of Anahita. Sassan was most likely from a long line of Zoroastrian priests who had served in that temple. The *Karnamak Ardashir* (Ardashir's Book of Deeds) describes Sassan as a descendant of the Achaemenids, perhaps in an attempt to legitimize Ardashir's bid to unite and rule the Iranian peoples under his banner. Despite the aforementioned variation in primary sources (e.g. *Karnamak*, Agathias, al-Tabari, etc.), it is possible that Sassan married Denak, who bore him a son named Babak (Papak or Papag). Like Sassan, Babak was also a priest in the Temple of Anahita.[6] An alternative and widely accepted analysis is that Sassan was the father of Ardashir, with the latter then being adopted by Babak after Sassan's death.[7] Ardashir was given the rule of Darabgerd and the title "Argbad"[8] by Guchehr, the King of Persis, whose lineage apparently traced back to Seleucid times.

The rule of Guchehr was soon challenged by Ardashir, who, acting in concert with his "father" Babak, overthrew him by 200. Nevertheless, the kingship of Persis was to pass to Ardashir's elder brother Shapur after Babak's death. Not content at being a minor ruler, Ardashir challenged his brother to battle. Shapur, however, died mysteriously under the collapsing structure of an old Achaemenid fortress before the battle could be joined. Ardashir then declared himself as King of Persis by 208, over the protests of his other brothers who were put to death.[9] A number of the local petty kings of Persis refused to accept Ardashir as their king, so Ardashir responded by campaigning and subduing all of them. A memorable confrontation occurred in German (modern Kerman), where Ardashir fought and defeated a certain magus named Haftanbokht (lit. seven-headed hydra). After

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LEFT Lance duel at Naghsh-e-Rustam, under the tomb of Xerxes I, showing Hormuz II unseating an adversary, early 4th century AD. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge)

RIGHT Silver and gold dish showing Sassanian monarch hunting, 6th–7th century AD. Note the detail of the bow and archery techniques, horse harness and sword handle. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

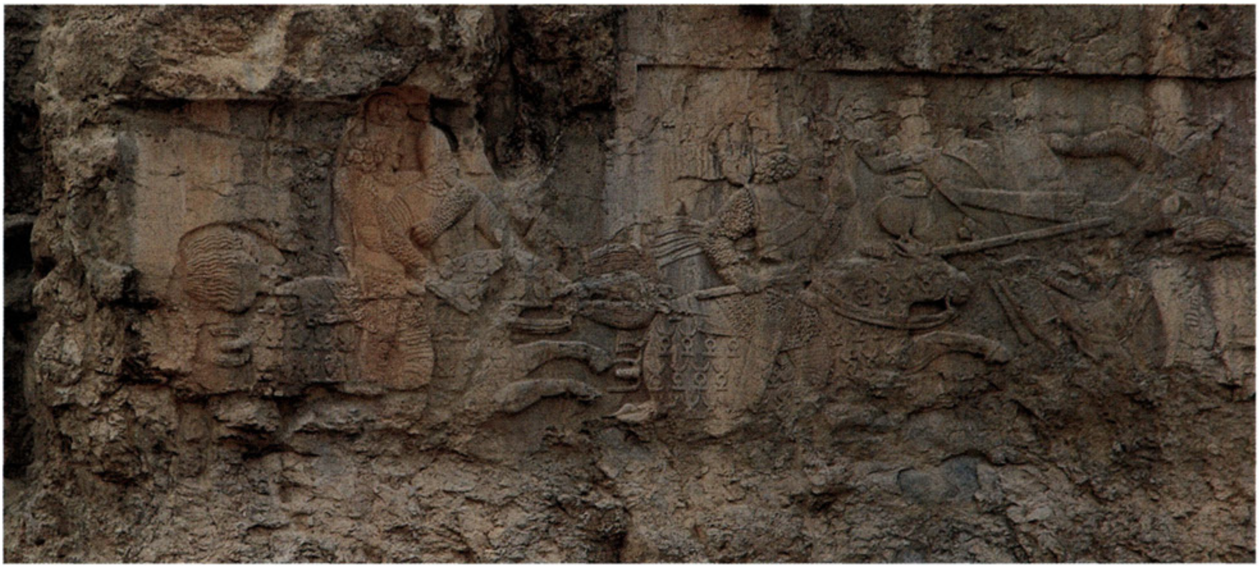
This 3rd-century rock relief is sited by a Sassanian road in the mountains outside Firuzabad. The 59ft (18m) long carving commemorates the victory of Ardashir I over Ardavan V in the battle-joust of Hormozgan c.AD 224: the relief shows three pairs of Sassanian knights defeating their Parthian opponents. (© Livius.org)

this success, Ardashir had to subdue local kings such as Balash of German, Nirofar of the Khuzi of Ahvaz, Shaz-Shapur of Isfahan, and Sinatruk of Oman.[10] These developments were now being viewed with considerable alarm by the Parthian leadership in Ctesiphon.

Ardashir rebels against the Parthians

Ardashir openly challenged the authority of the Parthians in Ctesiphon in 224. Despite early Parthian successes, the military initiative had swung towards the Romans since Emperor Trajan's invasion of 116. Parthian prestige was severely undermined after the capture of Ctesiphon in 116, 164, and 198. Even when the Parthians did attack and occupy Roman territory, their gains were decisively wiped out after the inevitable Roman counterattacks. Unless a major transformation took place within Persia, Roman ascendancy was bound to increase, and with that, the increased possibility of a Roman occupation beyond Mesopotamia. When Ardashir formally rebelled against the Parthians at Ctesiphon, he found eager supporters for his cause well outside of Persis, especially in Media, Media Atropatene, Adiabene, and Kurdistan.

The expansion of Ardashir's power through the submission of Persis, Susa, Isfahan (ancient Aspadana), Mesene, and German meant a diminution of Parthian authority in Ctesiphon, one that Ardavan V could not ignore. Ardashir realized that the only way he could unseat the House of Parthia at Ctesiphon was to reach out to the Iranian highlanders in the northwest. This is corroborated by the *Arbela Chronicles*, which state that the Persians forged an alliance with the Medes and together drew the local kings of Adiabene and Karka de Bet Selok (modern Kirkuk) into a greater alliance.[11] Adiabene and Kirkuk were significant, as they had been a meeting ground between the Aramaic speakers of ancient Assyria, and the Iranian-speaking Kurds and Medes. Ardashir was now poised to lead a union of the western Iranians against the Parthians.



This section of the Firuzabad relief shows at left, a Sassanian knight, recognizable by his helmet and the crest on his horse's caparison, who has swept his opponent off his horse. Right of this, Shapur, son of Ardashir, is shown unhorsing Darbandan, grand vizier of Parthia. Shapur's hat, which ends in an animal's head, shows him to be the crown prince. (© Livius.org)

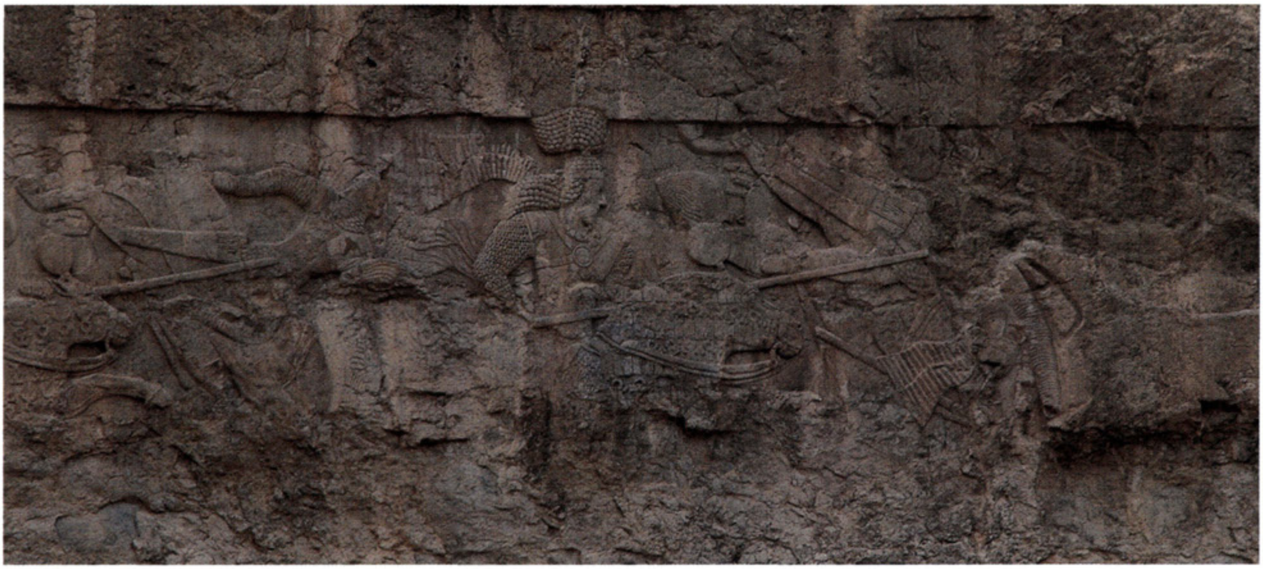
Firuzabad AD 224: the world's first lance duel

Ardashir defeated the Parthians in three battles, with the final showdown occurring at Hormozgan, probably in April 224.[12] Ardashir's force consisted of Persians, Medes, and Aramaic speakers from ancient Kirkuk.[13] The battle, depicted as a major joust in the Firuzabad reliefs, resulted in Ardavan's death. Some resistance remained after Hormozgan, and there is mention of an Astavades who reigned briefly for a year between 226 and *c*.230. The vast majority of Parthian knights and nobles now joined their Persian, Median, and Kurdish brethren in a new Iranian kingdom, as attested to by the inscriptions on the Zoroaster Cube at Naghsh-e-Rustam near Shiraz. Ardashir accorded the utmost respect to the Parthian nobles, and performed ancient religious rituals in their honor at Naghsh-e-Rustam.

It was under the Parthian dynasty that the Achaemenid culture of the duel transformed into that of "Pahlavan" chivalry. Parthian knights are shown with lances, as seen at Dura Europus. While Firuzabad could very well have been a set-piece battle, there seems to have been a particular emphasis on the "heroic" lance joust. This may be due to the fact that the rival armies were "dueling" for the Empire, although there is no way of corroborating this thesis.

The details of the lance battle have been commemorated with detailed rock carvings at Firuzabad. There are three combats detailed on a panoramic rock cliff. To the left is a mounted knight wrestling against his Parthian opponent, in the middle rides crown prince Shapur, whose lance has struck and unseated Parthian Grand Vizier Darbandan. Lastly, to the right is King Ardashir I whose lance has thrust into Ardavan V. It is also significant that each warrior fights against an opponent of equal rank, a tradition that was to appear 700 years later amongst the Samurai warriors of Japan.[14] The notion of the *mard-o-mard* (lit. man-to-man) duel had now evolved into what Wiesehofer terms as the Sassanian notion of "chivalrous single combat."[15]

The outcome of the battle decided the issue of the leadership of Persia. When Ardashir was victorious, the major Parthian clans offered their allegiance to the monarch most



This section of the relief shows Ardashir unhorsing Ardavan V. Ardashir's hair, gathered into a bunch above his head to form the Sassanian *koryombos*, has lost its covering, and is shown streaming out behind his head. (© Livius.org)

capable of defending the realm. The results of the joust were always expected to be honored, whether the combat took place between Iranians, or Iranians versus Romans. A remarkable example of this occurred in 421, when King Bahram Gur yielded the field of battle to the Romans when his champion, Ardazan, from the elite Immortal cavalry unit, was defeated and killed by his counterpart, a Goth in Roman service by the name of Areobindus.

Two elements distinguish the Iranian duel from the contemporary Roman style. Iranian combat was mounted and man-to-man, without interference by either army, whereas in the earlier history of the Roman Empire, "man-to-man" style duels were not a part of the Roman military tradition. Second, only in Sassanian Persia do rock carvings first show knights charging towards each other with two-handed lances, with the lances about to meet, whereas Roman artisans portrayed Roman cavalrymen as simply riding down their enemies.[16] Duels among the contemporary Romans were neither of the "heroic" Greek-Homeric tradition, nor of the Germanic custom of a leader leading his soldiers in the van on foot. The "chivalry culture" of the mard-o-mard duel was not confined to the Persian realm, however – it was part of a larger Iranian cultural arena that, at its greatest extent, spanned across Central Asia, parts of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Examples of rock reliefs depicting dueling lancers have been found in the Bosphorus amongst the Sarmatians[17] as well as in Bulgaria.

Sassanian champions often challenged the best of the Roman warriors to the joust before the main clash of armies began. There are a number of Roman references to Iranian lance warfare. The first Roman record of Sassanian knights engaging Roman soldiers in the mounted duel is made by the solider-historian Procopius. At the Sassanian assault on Dara (530), Procopius records that "one Persian, a young man and riding very close to the Roman army, began to challenge all of them."[18] The Thracian commander sent Andreas, a Germanic wrestler and bath attendant, to fight the Persian. It is then recorded that "both rushed madly upon each other with their spears, and the weapons driven against their corselets were turned aside with mighty force."[19] Neither was killed by the lance charge, Andreas was first to draw his sword and slew his opponent.

By the time of Belisarius in the 5th century AD, Byzantine champions were engaging the Goths and the Sassanians in lance duels. There are indications that non-Romans influenced by Iranian military traditions fought the lance duel on Roman behalf.[20]

The Sassanian military machine: Rome's new rival

None of the depictions of early Sassanian warriors at Naghsh-e-Rustam, Naghsh-e-Rajab, or Bishapur reveal any of the *Savaran* (elite Sassanian cavalry) with shields.[21] This does not mean that shields were totally dispensed of by the early Savaran, but the handling of the two-handed lance in battle precluded the simultaneous use of any shield, and the early Savaran had achieved a high degree of protection by employing both mail and lamellar armor.[22]

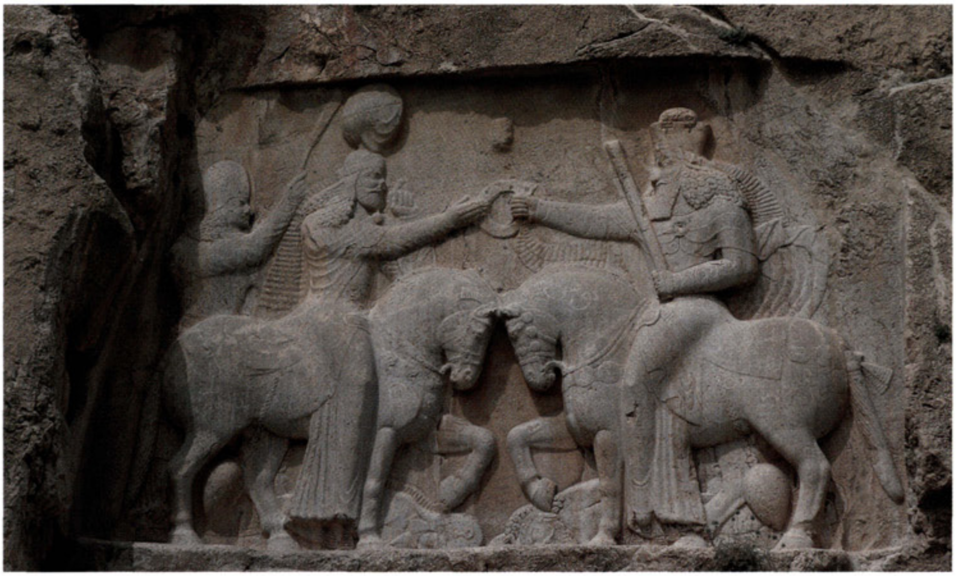
The combination of ring armor (for legs and arms), plate armor, and mail optimized the battlefield protection of the Savaran, making them far deadlier than the Parthians. The Romans proved unable to effectively neutralize the early Savaran on the battlefield. The primary weapon appears to have been the long lance used against mounted opponents and Roman infantry. Despite quivers being depicted in sites such as Naghsh-e-Rustam, no portrayal of archery is seen. Archery, however, continued its role as a specialized support arm among both mounted and infantry units. This meant that the early Sassanians had a "Parthian appearance," with lancers being supported by horse archers. Nevertheless, the Sassanians were a far more dangerous force from the Roman standpoint. Mounted archery amongst the Sassanians may have acquired a higher degree of sophistication, especially with respect to armored protection. The Romans had learnt to offset Parthian horse archery by recruiting auxiliary archers, but the application of these same troops and methods were to soon fail against the Sassanians. It is very likely that the Sassanian horse archers wore armor, perhaps some of them in the manner of their lance-wielding Savaran comrades. This may partly explain the Sassanian successes at Ctesiphon, Misiche, and Barbalissos. Nevertheless, the existence of an armored horse archer force among the Parthians certainly cannot be ruled out. One early indication of such a horseman is found at Dura Europus, where graffiti depict what appears to be a cataphract archer.[23]

If the early Savaran were somewhat similar to the Parthians in having separate units for lancers and horse archers, they differed from their predeccessors in the greater sophistication of their armor, and the appearance of "heavy" lancers carrying quivers. This indicates that the Sassanian Savaran were not necessarily as "binary" as the Parthians in differentiating the functions of horse archers and lancers. This means that the Savaran could resort to archery if battlefield circumstances so dictated. If true, what would the rider do with his lance if he wished to engage in archery or close-quarter combat? One possibility is that swords and quivers were intended as a "back-up system" in case the lance was broken or lost. It is also possible that the Sassanian horse archers carried hand-to-hand weapons. Strong Sarmatian influences on early Sassanian blade weapons, especially swords, were indicative of the long-standing cultural and technological links between the Iranian plateau and Central Asia.[24]

Conquest of Roman territory often meant that important towns and fortresses had to be taken by siege. The Sassanians, unlike the Parthians, were very well versed in siege technology, and soon came to be an equal match for the Romans. Most experts would agree, however, that the original technology of siege warfare came by way of the Romans, with the Sassanians then building their own machines and later adopting Chinese technologies. The various tools used by the Sassanians in siegecraft included catapults, "scorpions," battering rams, the use of flammable materials (e.g. naphtha) propelled by missiles, mobile towers, and ballistic weapons of varying size and strength. Once enemy fortifications had been breached, the dismounted Savaran seem to have supported the infantry's assault of the fortress or city. It is first during Shapur's campaigns in 256 that the Sassanians demonstrated their advanced skills in siegecraft, especially in the capture of Antioch and Dura Europus.

Ardashir I: consolidation of the new empire

After the fall of the Parthians at Hormozgan, Ardashir implemented a policy of centralization. The main objective was to replace the Parthian system of loosely federated provinces with a more centralized system of government. The majority of the Medes, Media Atropatene, and even the Assyrians readily joined Ardashir, although King Madig of the Kurds rose against him. Madig defeated Ardashir in their first engagement, but was soon crushed by Ardashir.[25] This concluded Ardashir's campaign to reunite the western Iranians, a process that the Parthians had not been able to maintain during their rule. With the western marches secure, Ardashir now turned his attentions towards the north and east. In a series of campaigns initiated in 227, Ardashir achieved great successes in Makran, Seistan, and Gorgan, which were all formally incorporated into the new Empire. The regions of Balkh, Margiana, and Chorasmia were also annexed by Ardashir. The Kushans acknowledged Ardashir's ascendancy, but seem to have maintained some measure of independence until the 240s. Sassanian authority soon reached as far as the Indus River, a development that was to greatly facilitate the economic, artistic, and scientific relations between Persia and India.



This relief at Naghsh-e-Rustam shows Ardashir I at left accepting the "Farr" (divine glory) from the supreme Aryan god, Ahura Mazda. Ardashir's horse is trampling a defeated foe, most likely Ardavan V, while Ahura Mazda's horse crushes the defeated manifestation of evil and enemy of the Aryans, Ahriman. (© Livius.org)

During his 20-year reign, Ardashir not only consolidated Sassanian power, but was able to defeat Roman attempts at destroying the new Iranian Empire. The Romans were pushed out of Mosul, a city with a mixed Mede and Assyrian population. Ardashir, however, was unable to conquer Hatra, a city still loyal to the deposed Parthian dynasty.[26] The Romans also retained their hold on Adiabene. Armenia maintained its independence from Ardashir thanks in part to a group of pro-Parthian nobles, who had retreated to the Caucasus.[27]

Ardashir I and the campaigns of Alexander Severus

The Romans soon realized that the "new management" in Persia was a power to be reckoned with. Ardashir boldly claimed "his rightful inheritance from his forefathers" in having all territories of the ancient Achaemenid Empire as far the Aegean Sea restituted to Persia.[28] The Romans who occupied all territories west of the Tigris knew that a showdown with the new Sassanian Empire was all but inevitable. Ardashir's proclamation of a new pan-Iranic super-state was also a potential challenge in places such as eastern Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia, which teemed with large numbers of Medes and Kurds. The sheer charisma of Ardashir also caused the defection of a number of Roman troops to the Sassanians.[29] It is possible that Ardashir encouraged the mutiny against Flavius Heraclio, the governor of Mesopotamia. The Roman troops in Mesopotamia and Syria were suffering from poor discipline and low morale, just as Ardashir was preparing to strike. In 229, Ardashir and his son Shapur I attacked and ejected the Romans from Mesopotamia and Syria.[30]

The Roman response was circumspect at first. Emperor Alexander Severus (r. AD 222–235) sent a letter to Ardashir demanding that he withdraw or face the same defeats as those suffered by Parthian Persia at the hands of Trajan, Lucius Verus, and Septimius Severus.[31] Alexander Severus not only failed to intimidate the Sassanians, but was also unable to prevent Ardashir from invading and capturing Cappadocia.[32] Realizing that Ardashir was not about to meekly comply with his demands, Severus prepared for war. The Emperor assembled a new army in Italy, yet he did make another attempt at negotiating with or intimidating the Sassanians.[33] Ardashir responded by dispatching an embassy of 400 "very tall Persians" to Severus, who reiterated the demand that Rome vacate the entire Near East and surrender its territories as far as (and including) the Aegean Sea.[34] In response, Severus had the delegation arrested, disarmed, and exiled to work in farmlands[35] in Anatolia. Dodgeon and Lieu, however, disagree that Ardashir had made such bombastic demands, and attribute the information to the contemporary Greco-Roman historiography of presenting Persia as an expansionist and aggressive empire.[36] This new thesis sees Ardashir as confining his demands to Mesopotamia and Armenia.

The Emperor had no choice now but to attack. He was hampered by revolts in Egypt and Syria, which had to be suppressed first.[37] Once the Roman Near East was secured, Severus was ready to attack Persia at last. The Roman attack in 231 was deployed along three axes.[38] The first (northern) thrust took place through Armenia and from there into Atropatene. The second (southern) thrust punched across the Tigris and Euphrates rivers into Mesopotamia. The aim of this force was to apparently avoid the Seleucia-Ctesiphon metropolis and to head for Khuzistan in southwest Iran.[39] The third and most powerful thrust was in the center, which endeavored to capture Ctesiphon. The central axis of attack was led by the Emperor himself. Severus also paid a visit to Palmyra to trick Ardashir into thinking that the main weight of the attack was to fall along the southern axis.[40]

The northern attack was a resounding success. First, the Persians were cleared out of Cappadocia and the siege of Nisibis was lifted.[41] From Cappadocia, the Romans entered Armenia and then south into Media Atropatene. This allowed the Romans to break into northwest Iran and ravage the region. The "European" geography of northwest Iran with its mountainous and forested countryside was ideal for the Roman infantry, which, according to Herodian, also "hampered the movements of the barbarian [Sassanian] cavalry..."[42] Ardashir, now realizing the danger of a Roman breakthrough beyond Atropatene, left behind a force to counter it. He then proceeded to confront the dangerous Roman thrusts into Mesopotamia. The southern Roman axis had been making steady progress but had not yet reached into southwest Iran (Khuzistan). To the Romans it must have seemed as if they were about to repeat the successes of Trajan and Verus. Ardashir's forces, however, were very much intact and the Romans had yet to face his cavalry which "use the bow and the horse ... reared with these from childhood ... never lay aside their quivers or dismount from their horses..."[43]

It was in 233 when Alexander's fortunes began to sour. The "central axis" facing the most professional Sassanian troops, was not doing so well. First, the Legio IV *Scythica* had moved against Ardashir from Dura Europus and had been soundly beaten. Undeterred, Alexander Severus ordered another strike, which advanced towards Ctesiphon. It was here where the Savaran knights inflicted their first crushing defeat on the Romans. Like Marcus Crassus in 54, Alexander Severus' dream of becoming a Roman Alexander the Great by reaching the borders of India was to end in failure.[44] Roman sources have provided detailed descriptions of the defeat of Alexander Severus' forces against Ardashir at Ctesiphon in 233. This is corroborated by Herodian who noted that:

> The Persian king attacked the [Roman] army with his entire force [heavy armored cavalry and horse archers], catching them by surprise and surrounding them in a trap. Under fire from all sides, the Roman soldiers were destroyed ... in the end they were all driven into a mass ... bombarded from every direction ... the Persians trapped the Romans like a fish in a net; firing their arrows from all sides at the encircled soldiers, the Persians massacred the whole army ... they were all destroyed ... this terrible disaster, which no one cares to recall, was a set-back for the Romans, since a vast army ... had been destroyed.[45]

The victory achieved by the early Savaran cavalry was very similar to their Parthian predecessors. Repeated lance charges by the Savaran knights forced the Roman infantry into smaller and more compact formations, allowing the horse archers to discharge their deadly volleys of missiles into their tightly packed ranks. The victory at Ctesiphon, however, was not followed up with a counterthrust into Roman territory, leading to speculations that the Sassanians, like the Romans, must have suffered heavy casualties in the battle. The Romans had paid dearly for having divided their forces into three separate thrusts. Ardashir simply observed the Roman axes of advance, and then decided where he was going to strike with the bulk of his forces. The outcome of the Ctesiphon battle may have been different had Severus maintained a single force, rather than simultaneously frittering away portions of his armies towards the northwest and southwest of Iran.

After the defeat at Ctesiphon, Severus delivered a "victory" speech to the Roman senate on September 25, 233, indicating that his forces had destroyed 218 elephants, 1,800 scythed chariots and "120,000 of their [Sassanian] cavalry…"[46] Iran's smaller population base relative to Rome precluded any possibility of them fielding such fantastic numbers of cavalry in the early 3rd century AD. The full professional complement of the Sassanian army nearly 250 years later in 578 AD stood only at a maximum of 70,000 professional troops![47] Even more interesting is the omission by Severus of any mention of the battle at Ctesiphon. While Severus certainly contained Ardashir, his claims of conquering Persia and having destroyed the Sassanian army appear to have been propaganda exaggerations at best. According to Cedrenus, "He [Alexander Severus] campaigned against the Persians and was overwhelmed in defeat."[48]

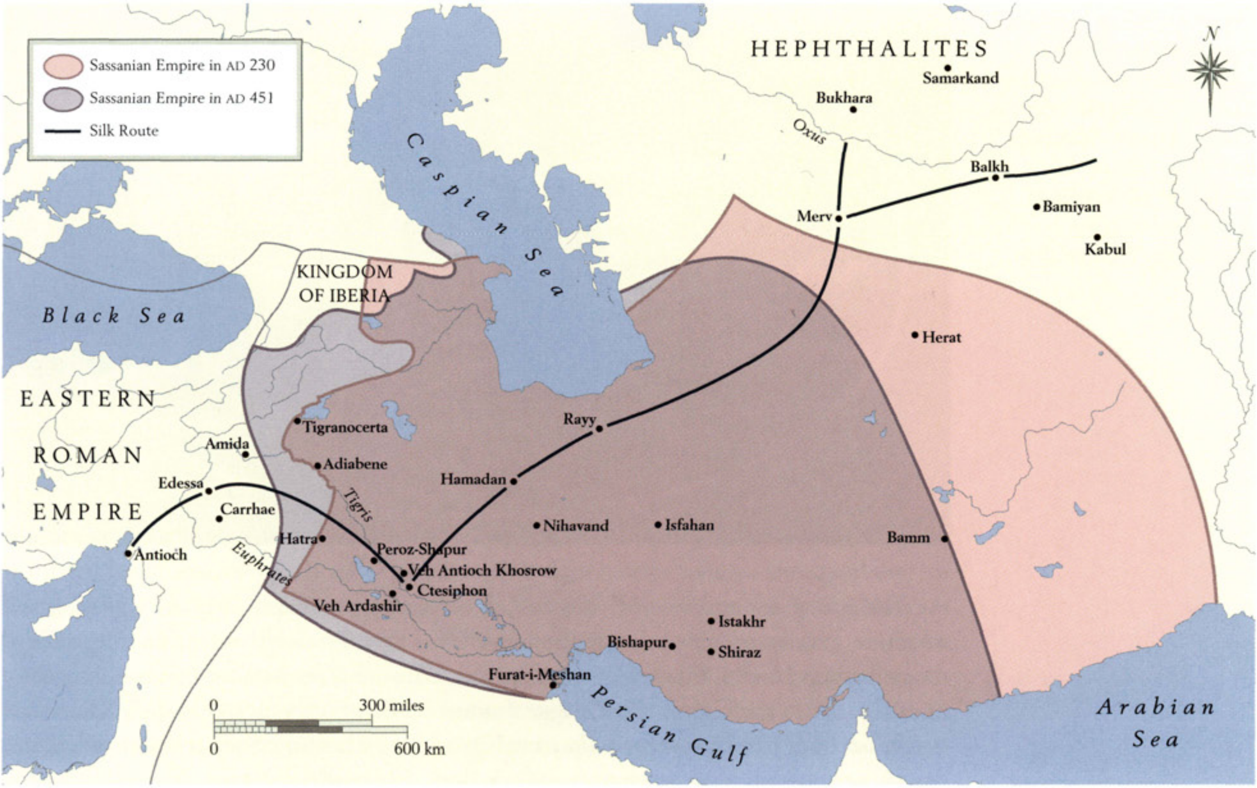
Ardashir may have indeed been too exhausted to advance after Ctesiphon, a thesis popular among contemporary Western historians.[49] Another possibility is that Ardashir's strategy had now become more modest and defensive. An all-out thrust against the Romans after the Ctesiphon victory would have put the young Sassanian Empire at risk. There were threats in the east and the Caucasus by enemies who were opposed to the legitimacy of Ardashir's rule. The King was also exhausted from having fought so many battles over nearly three decades; he was now ready to pass the mantle of kingship to his son, Shapur.

Shapur I: Rome meets its match

Ardashir gave up his throne for his son Shapur I (lit. Son of the King) (r. AD 241–272) in 240. Interestingly, a number of coins portray Shapur and Ardashir as co-rulers up to this time. The official coronation of Shapur seems to have occurred in 241 after Ardashir's death. Shapur had been present in the battles of his father from the early days of the rebellion in Persis to the campaigns of Alexander Severus. Shapur had proven himself to be a capable warrior and his exploits were to soon exceed those of his father. His first military action as king was to successfully storm the formidable defenses of the city of Hatra, which had withstood the armies of Rome and Ardashir alike. The strategic fortress-city of Nisibis was also captured either in 241 or in Ardashir's time in 238.[50] Shapur's tactic was to approach the city rapidly with the Savaran and to surround it. The obstinate defenders of Nisibis proved difficult to defeat; however, these were finally subdued when a breach was created in the city's otherwise impregnable walls. The fall of Nisibis allowed Shapur to thrust into Syria, leading to the capture of Antioch and Carrhae (Harran).[51] The Roman strategic situation in the Near East was now in serious danger of unraveling.

The young Emperor Gordian III (r. AD 238–244) moved quickly to restore the Roman position in the Near East and to destroy Shapur. With the assistance of his father-in-law, Timesitheus, Gordian III successfully defeated the Sassanians in 242 or 243 in ancient Resaina (in modern Turkey).[52] Gordian III soon cleared the Sassanians out of Antioch, Carrhae, and, most importantly, Nisibis. The Euphrates was soon crossed, and the Sassanians were now being firmly pushed back inside their borders. At this juncture, Timesitheus died of illness, which was a serious blow to the Romans, given his excellent skills as a military commander. There are two accounts as to what happened next. The first version as stated by numerous Greco-Roman sources such as Ammianus

The Sassanian Empire AD 230–451


Sassanian Empire in AD 230
Sassanian Empire in AD 451
Silk Route
HEPHTHALITES
Samarkand
Bukhara
Oxus
Balkh
Merv
Bamiyan
Kabul
Caspian Sea
KINGDOM OF IBERIA
Black Sea
Herat
EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
Tigranocerta
Rayy
Amida
Adiabene
Hamadan
Edessa
Tigris
Carrhae
Nihavand
Isfahan
Bamm
Hatra
Peroz-Shapur
Antioch
Euphrates
Veh Antioch Khosrow
Ctesiphon
Veh Ardashir
Istakhr
Bishapur
Shiraz
Furat-i-Meshan
0
300 miles
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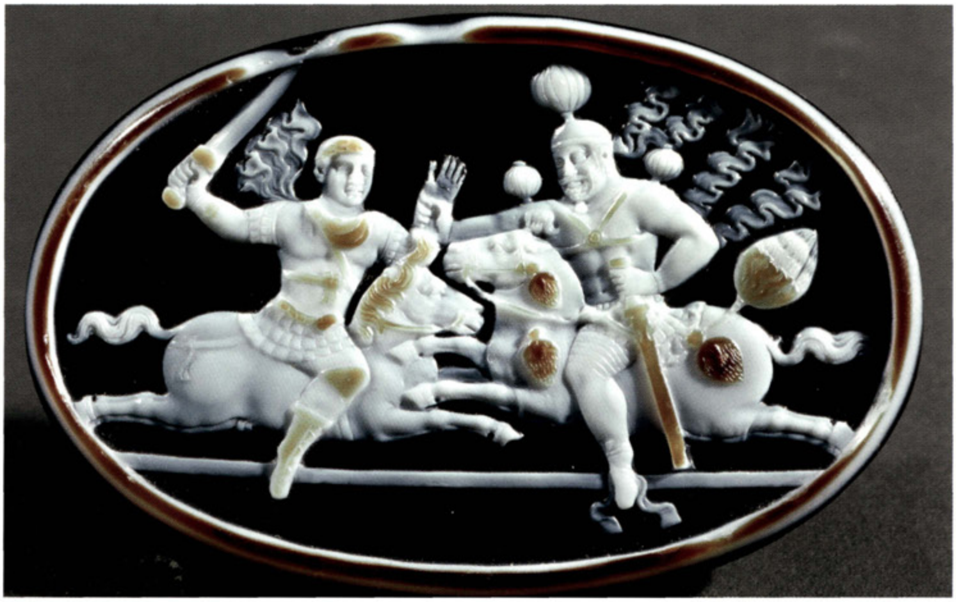
600 km
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
N

Marcellinus, Festus, and Jordanes is that Gordian met Shapur in a final battle and defeated him, but was himself murdered by the Praetorian Prefect, Philip the Arab, after the engagement.[53] This narrative, however, is contradicted by another version of those events; Oracula Sibyllina and Zosimus clearly state that Gordian lost the final battle and his life fighting Shapur.[54] The latter (largely ignored) version is corroborated by the rock reliefs at Bishapur in Iran, which show Gordian being trampled under Shapur's stallion. Interestingly Cedrenus notes that "He [Gordian] died after falling from his horse…"[55] Orthographic verification of Shapur's victory is provided by the inscriptions of Shapur, which clearly state that Gordian was decisively defeated at Misiche (modern Anbar) north of Ctesiphon in AD 244.[56] The Shapur inscription at Naghsh-e-Rustam states that "at Misiche, a great frontal battle occurred. Gordian Caesar was killed and the Roman force destroyed."[57]

After the defeat of Gordian at Misiche, Philip the Arab (r. AD 244–249) had now become emperor and immediately made peace with Shapur. According to the inscriptions, Philip paid 500,000 denarii[58] as ransom to assure the safe return of the remnants of the Roman army at Misiche, which the Sassanians now renamed "Peroz-Shapur" (lit. victorious Shapur).[59] Roman sources corroborate Philip as having made "a most dishonorable peace"[60] and that he ceded Armenia and Mesopotamia to Shapur.[61] The humiliating treaty, however, proved too bitter for the Romans to swallow; they soon reneged on the terms. Philip marched back into Armenia and Mesopotamia, apparently catching



Shapur I symbolically captures the Roman Emperor Valerian in battle. In reality, the capture of Valerian and his entourage took place after the defeat at Carrhae-Edessa. Sardonyx from Iran, Cabinet des Medailles, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

the Sassanians by surprise in 253.[62] This occurred as Shapur was in the midst of concluding his campaigns in northern and northeastern Persia, to obtain the allegiance of the remaining Medes, Khwarazmians, Kushans, Giloi, and Dailamites. It was during these campaigns that the city of NevShapur (modern Nishabur) was founded in Khorassan, northeast Iran. Having successfully campaigned in the region, Shapur was now able to return west, most likely now accompanied by the tough northern Iranian Dailamite infantry as well as cavalry (Giloi, Khwarazmians, etc.). The Shapur inscriptions report that:

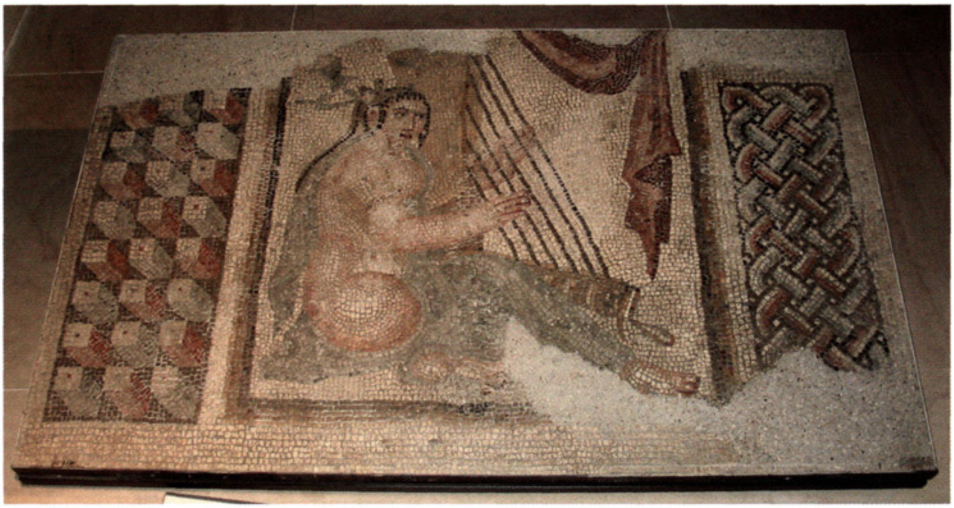
> Caesar [Philip] lied again and did wrong to Armenia. We [Shapur and his army] marched against the Roman Empire and annihilated an army of 60,000 men at Barbalissos.[63]

This now tore a wide gap in the Roman position in Mesopotamia, leading to the fall of Dura Europus and (once again) Antioch to "the arrow-shooting Persians" by *c.*256.[64] At this juncture Zosimus notes that "the Persians could have conquered the whole of Asia had they not been overjoyed at their excessive spoils…"[65] Most likely, Shapur's strategy was to simply consolidate his empire's position rather than attempt a vast territorial expansion at Roman expense.

Valerian (r. AD 253–260) organized a third Roman army to restore Roman fortunes in the east soon after ascending the throne. The Romans were keen to destroy Shapur, his army, and empire. Antioch was cleared of Sassanian troops by *c.*256, prompting Valerian to strike his own "victory" coins. This celebration proved premature, as Valerian had thus far only confronted second-rate garrison troops. Shapur had in fact conserved his cavalry and main army. He deployed to Carrhae and Edessa. Valerian rashly deployed his mainly infantry army towards Edessa-Harran, a flat region ideal for cavalry operations. This was the same region where Crassus' troops had been crushed by the Parthian cavalry over 200 years before. History was to repeat itself: the Savaran decisively crushed the Romans and captured 70,000 troops, including senators, and the Roman Prefect in *c.*260.[66] The Shapur inscriptions also report a wide range of European prisoners, including those from "Dacia [Modern Romania], Pannonia [Modern Hungary] ... Spain ... Thrace ... Germania."[67] The blows that Shapur inflicted upon the Roman army were indeed catastrophic; up to one-third of Rome's professional army (including officers), numbering around 150,000 troops, had been eliminated.[68] But the greatest psychological blow was the capture of Emperor Valerian and his ceremonial chariot as commemorated in the Shapur inscriptions, as well as the sites of Naghsh-e-Rustam and Bishapur. Never in the history of Rome had a Roman emperor been captured alive.[69] According to Ferril, "Valerian's defeat and capture number among the most humiliating military losses in Roman history."[70] Western sources report of Valerian meeting a cruel and tragic end at Persian hands. Roman accounts report him being used as a footstool for Shapur when mounting his horse. After his death, Valerian's body is said to have been stuffed and placed inside a Zoroastrian temple. Iranian historical accounts, however, dispute this. The *Shahname* epic cites Valerian as a man of good character who, after his defeat and capture, was treated honorably by Shapur.

Roman prisoners included a large number of engineers, who were soon put to work building dams and bridges in modern Khuzistan. Some of these, like the dam-bridge of Shushtar, have remains which have lasted to this day, a testament to the durability of Roman engineering skills. The mosaic works of the Roman craftsmen at Bishapur depicting Sassanian noblewomen and noblemen still stand, with near-intact examples present in the Louvre Museum in Paris. With the Romans now in full disarray, the Savaran broke into Roman Syria and Anatolia. Antioch again went from Roman to Sassanian hands. The Savaran then captured Tarsus (in Cilicia) and Cappadocia.

Odenathus, the King of Palmyra in modern Syria, made an appeal of friendship to Shapur, noting in his letters that "he had done nothing against the Persians."[71] This was arrogantly rejected by Shapur, who vowed to destroy Odenathus and his kingdom. Odenathus, however, successfully attacked the lumbering Sassanian baggage trains in Syria, forcing Shapur to pull back his forces into the Sassanian domains. Odenathus' offensive carried him to the gates of Ctesiphon. The Palmyran cavalry were equipped and trained



A mosaic from Bishapur showing a lady playing a harp, made by Roman prisoners-of-war captured by Shapur I. (© Livius.org) to fight in the Iranian "all-cavalry" doctrine. However, they also fielded excellent infantry, making them a small but highly professional military force. Nevertheless, the Palmyrans could not destroy the Savaran nor could they free Valerian. When news arrived of Odenathus' advance to Ctesiphon, the satraps of the Empire rapidly sent reinforcements to Shapur. These inflicted heavy losses on Odenathus, compelling him to withdraw.[72] Shapur's forces then campaigned against Palmyra, but with inconclusive results. Palmyra, though formidable, could never pose a mortal military threat against the Sassanian Empire, although Odenathus did ensure that the Sassanians would not expand into Syria.

Shapur had campaigned vigorously in the Empire's east before his battles against Philip the Arab. The most significant victory in the east was the incorporation of much of the Kushan kingdom into the Sassanian realm. While some Kushan regions around Kabul in modern Afghanistan seem to have retained some form of independence, the Sassanians were now definitively ascendant in the region. Kushan, the last major Iranian kingdom in the east, was now annexed into a larger Iranic Empire. As a result of the Sassanian-Kushan symbiosis, new forms of metalwork and arts were to develop, and Buddhism became a major influence in the Sassanian east, often blending with Zoroastrian themes.

Early Sassanian and Sarmatian influences on the Roman Army

Roman military defeats in the early 3rd century AD at the hands of Sassanian cavalry forced them to introduce a number of reforms, including the introduction of "Persian"-style cavalry into their armies by the time of Emperor Constantius in the 4th century AD.[73] It is no exaggeration to state that by the time of Emperor Justinian Byzantine and Sassanian Persian cavalry forces were almost identical in appearance.[74] Iranian cavalry units began to appear amongst Roman forces.[75] Examples include deserters from the Sassanian army who served the Roman Empire in Europe, notably during General Belisarius' wars against the Goths. The Sassanians introduced Iranian cavalry fighting methods and regalia to the West. However, the Iranian influence on the broader European cavalry tradition also came earlier by way of Eastern Europe, through the Sarmatians, who shared much of their culture with their ethnic kin in Sassanian Persia. The Roman Empire at first had no counter to the powerful lance charges of the Sarmatians of Eastern Europe in the 1st century BC. Units of Iazyges began to be recruited into Roman ranks as early as 69 AD.[76] It is now acknowledged that the Romans began to actually copy northern Iranian heavy cavalry. Arrian noted that by Hadrian's time there were Roman cavalrymen "who carry the *contus* [spear or lance] and attack in the manner of the Alans and Sarmatians."[77] The Sassanian and Sarmatian influences on the Romans, Germans, and Slavs have led a number of European scholars to acknowledge that Iranian-style duels seen among Europeans owe much to an "Iranian cultural milieu" and that "European chivalry … in the Middle Ages was descended from that evolved by the Parthians and Sassanians…"[78]

The magi of Naghsh-e-Rustam and Christianity

Western historians have often focused on the military aspects of the Naghsh-e-Rustam site near Shiraz, notably the personages of Philip the Arab, Valerian, and Shapur I.

Barely noticed is the figure of the magi with pointed index fingers. This pose is depicted in near-identical fashion centuries later in Europe, including the portrayal in Vicq (Indre) of the Journey of the Magi, the stained glass medallion of Moses in Saint Denis, and the Cross of St. Bertin in Saint Omer, both from 12th-century France.

The original magi were either a tribe or priestly class in the Median Empire. There may be a connection between the story of the three magi present during the birth of Christ and Persia. The location of the tombs of the magi in Iran has been variously reported as in Saveh by Marco Polo, and in Kashan by Sir John Mandeville.[79] The Mart Mariam Church in Urmia, Iranian Azerbaijan, reputedly houses the remains of one of the magi. Interestingly, the Gospels' references to the magi report them as being the "wise men from the east" with no reference to any Persian connections.[80] The Arabic Gospel pertaining to the Infancy of Jesus, however, reports "The Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem of Judea... Magi came from the east to Jerusalem as Zardusht [Zoroaster] had predicted..."[81] This passage referring to Prophet Zoroaster has received very little attention by Western scholars and theologians. Did the Romans attempt to "alter" references to Persia and Zoroaster due to hostile relations between the powers at the time? While the issue is far beyond the scope of this book, Evans-Wentz has opined that "Without Zoroaster there would be no Christ. He was the bridge, and the Romans burnt it..."[82] While the statement is exaggerated, the role of Iranian theology in the formation of Christianity has not received much attention from Judeo-Christian theologians. In addition to the profound similarities between the theology of Zoroastrianism and Judaism, there are also numerous close parallels between Christianity and Zoroastrianism. These include the concepts of the immortality of the soul, the linearity of time, an omnipotent force of good, an evil Satan, the forces of good versus evil,[83] a final apocalyptic battle (Armageddon), the day of judgment, and the existence of heaven and hell. Catholicism and Zoroastrianism both share the traditions of Soul Day, Ash Wednesday, and the confession of sins.

Mithraism: Christianity's forgotten rival

By the time of Shapur's wars, the Aryan god Mithras was highly popular among both Sassanian and Roman troops. Despite its Iranian origin, the cult had spread far and wide across Europe, into the Balkans, Italy, continental Europe, and England. The European Mithra movement lasted for approximately three centuries (approximately AD 100–400). Mithra is also an Old Persian cognate for "contract." The ancient Iranians would seal contracts with handshakes, as first depicted in Eski Kale, Turkey (300 BC) and Nimrud-Dagh, Turkey (69–34 BC).

Mithra, or Mehr, is the Lord of *Payman* (lit. contracts, oaths). Mithra stands for love, affection, friendship, light, and the sun. The god is also a companion in life, battle, and the after-life. He is born of the virgin Goddess Anahita, and leads the good against the armies of evil. The legacy of Mithra survives in Iran in rituals such as the *Mehregan* festival of the birth of Mithras, the *Darbe-Mehr* (Zoroastrian temple), the month of Mehr, the name Mehrdad (Mithradates), and Mithraic ceremonies in *Pir* (lit. old, wise) sanctuaries. The sword-wielding figure of Mithra at Tagh-e-Bostan in Iranian Kurdistan (western Iran) bears silent testimony to the importance of Mithra in Sassanian Persia.

It is as yet unclear how and when Mithraism first spread into the Roman Empire. Most likely, the movement spread through Anatolia, especially Cappadocia, Pontus, and

Commagene, where the Iranian magi were prominent. Another factor in the spread of the cult, especially across the Mediterranean, may have been the Cilicians, although more research is required to investigate that possibility. It is also possible to speculate on the "conversion" of at least some of the many Roman prisoners taken during Shapur's wars, some of whom later returned to the West.

What has attracted the attention of Western scholarship is the curious European cult of Mithraism, known as the Mithraic mysteries, which had certain rituals that differed from the cults in Persia. The slaying of the bull, for example, was a ceremony found only in European Mithraic temples. The Mithraic mysteries had seven stages of ascension, with at least two of these connected to Persia. These were Stage V, *Perses* (Persian) and the final stage (VII) *Pater* (Father), who wore a Persian cap. Interestingly, Western scholarship, Ulanssey in particular, has expended much effort in attempting to differentiate the Mithraic mysteries from Iran.

There have been no academic investigations as to why, excepting a few details, the stories of Jesus Christ the son of God, and Mithras son of Mazda, are so strikingly identical: virgin birth on the same day, the performance of miracles, the ritual of baptism, a sacramental meal of bread and wine, 12 disciples, and finally death and resurrection. The Mithras saga predates Christianity by over a thousand years, to the arrival of the first Indo-Aryans on the Iranian plateau around 1500 BC or earlier. Before its demise in the 4th century AD, Mithraism had become Christianity's major "pagan" rival in Europe. The late French historian, Ernest Renan, has noted that "if Christianity had been stopped at its birth by some mortal illness, the world would have become Mithraic."[84] While Renan's statement remains controversial nearly a century later, Western scholarship has yet to acknowledge or investigate the role of Mithraic influence on the formation of European culture and Christianity.

The early Sassanians and the spread of Manichaeism

Mani was born on April 14, 216, in the village of Mardinu (near present-day Basra, south Iraq[85]), then a predominantly Babylonian district.[86] Mani's parents were Iranian;[87] his father Patik was a prince of the Parthian royal family,[88] and his mother was of the Kamsarakan clan, itself related to Parthian nobility.[89] Mani reportedly experienced a series of visions, the first one at the age of four. The final "revelation" encouraged Mani to preach his message in public.

Mani's philosophy synthesized Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism.[90] The power of evil was identified with matter. The good was identified with the spirit. As bodies are material in nature, these were considered as evil; only the soul within the body was considered good. This doctrine led to Mani's rejection of the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body of Christ.[91] Mani viewed creation as evil and the result of the conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The "spiritual goal" was to separate spirit from matter in order to enter the "kingdom of light." Mani's dietary laws were similar to those of Buddhism in that the consumption of meats, eggs, or animal products were forbidden. There was special antipathy directed against sexual activity. Procreation was seen as perpetuating evil, as spiritual entities would become "trapped" in material bodies. From all the prophets, Mani felt closest to Jesus, and referred to himself as "the Apostle of Jesus Christ,"[92] or by the Iranicized "Jesus Aryaman." Mani's ideas were wholly and vehemently rejected by the Zurvanist and Zoroastrian magi, and later by the clergy of the Christian churches.

Mani's first major success was the conversion of Prince Peroz, a brother of Shapur.[93] Peroz arranged for Mani to gain an audience with King Shapur. He was accompanied by his father, and two disciples. It was during his second audience that Mani proclaimed his doctrine and presented his book, *Shapurakan,* to the King.[94] Shapur was duly impressed with Mani, and made him an honorary member of his *darbar* (royal court), allowing him to accompany the army in the victorious campaigns against the Romans.[95] After these campaigns, Mani continued to preach in Persis, Parthav, and even those areas bordering the Roman Empire. Shapur's patronage of Mani may have been an attempt to further cement the bonds of unity within the Empire. By Shapur's time, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians lived side by side in Persia. In theory, Mani's message could unify the "western" religions (Judeo-Christianity) with the "eastern" Buddhist doctrines within a Zoroastrian context.

The stable reigns of Ardashir and Shapur were followed by a succession of ephemeral rulers, which ultimately proved fatal to Mani. Hormuz I (r. AD 272–273), the son of Shapur I, continued to support Mani and the preaching of his message. He also continued Shapur's policy of limiting the power of the nobles and the "orthodox" Zoroastrian magi. Hormuz was either removed a year later by the nobles and the magi, or died of "natural causes." He was followed by his brother, Bahram I (r. AD 273–276), whom some Iranian historians have characterized as being "a weak-willed plaything in the hands of the magi and the nobles."[96] At the behest of the Mobad Kartir, Mani was tortured and put to death in 276. Mani's disciples fled towards Europe and Central Asia. It is possible that the spread of Manichaeism among the Kushans in Central Asia had been a source of aggravation among some members of the nobility.[97]

Mani's disciples fanned out across the Oxus River into Central Asia. They encountered Iranian-speakers in Soghdia, an important trading area on the Silk Route with good communications with East and West.[98] Many Soghdians were converted to Manichaeism, and many of these Soghdian traders were commercially active in China. The Manichaean presence was especially strong in the city of Samarkand.[99] It was in Central Asia where the Manichaeans had their greatest success. The Turkish Uighur king officially endorsed Manichaeism as the official religion of his kingdom. The entire Uighur Kingdom, with its large city at Lo-Yang, was now open to the Manichaeans. The collapse of the Uighur Kingdom in the 9th century forced the movement into hiding, until their final destruction during the Mongol conquests.

What is remarkable about the history of Manichaeism is how quickly it spread from Persia in the years 244 to 262.[100] Mani's doctrines had already spread during his lifetime from his native Persia to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Manichaeans seem to have had a very powerful influence in ancient Judea, Palestine, and Syria. There are reports of Manichaeans in existence in the Sinai as late as the early 420s AD.[101] The Manichaean creed seems to have had considerable success in Egypt for some time; it is reputed that one of the governors of Alexandria under the Emperor Constantine was a follower of Manichaeism. From Egypt, Manichaeism spread across North Africa and from there to Spain (Hispania). From Syria, Manichaeism went north into Anatolia (Asia Minor), and from there to Greece, Illyria (roughly modern Albania, Bosnia, Croatia), and further westwards into Italy and finally into Gaul (France). Considerable effort went into converting the Chinese and the Turks to Manichaean philosophy. Manichaean influence in China occurred during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) and then with the rise of the Tang dynasty in AD 618.

As the Manichaeans gained more ground, the Romans enacted more serious countermeasures against them. Emperor Diocletian issued his well-known anti-Manichaean edict in Alexandria (March 31, 296).[102] Not only was Manichaeism labeled as the *Doctrina Persica* (the Persian doctrine), its followers were also accused of beastly actions and criminal acts. Harsh measures were put into force; Manichaeist books were to be burnt, its followers executed, their properties confiscated, and their wills annulled.[103] The anti-Manichaean edicts continued with subsequent emperors. In the Christian world, theologian St. Augustine was a follower of the Manichaean creed for nine years until he adopted Christianity.[104] Manichaean thinking may have continued to influence St. Augustine after his conversion, although he later devoted a large portion of his efforts into refuting the "erroneous" doctrines of Mani. Despite the zeal of his newly found Christianity, St. Augustine was left with the dualistic legacy of the Manichaean explanation of good and evil, especially with the Christian notion of the "battle" between the temptations of the flesh versus the spirit. Many of the Manichaean-inspired heresies in Europe, such as the Bogomils (Bosnia), and Cathars (southern France), may be traced as having come from Armenia and spread from there to the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Elements of such "heresies" may have survived as late as the 16th century in Russia.

Setbacks on the Roman frontier and Armenia

Bahram I's lack of resolve in internal affairs manifested itself, disastrously, in foreign affairs. Queen Zenobia, the widow of King Odenathus, had appealed to Bahram for assistance against an impending Roman offensive on her kingdom of Palmyra. Bahram promised assistance, but provided very little military aid. Emperor Aurelian (r. AD 270–275) destroyed Palmyra and captured Zenobia, parading her as a war trophy in Rome. Bahram had not only lost a potentially valuable ally and buffer state, he had also earned the wrath of the Romans for his recent (empty) promises of support for Zenobia. Seeking retribution, Aurelian encouraged the tribes in the Caucasus to invade Atropatene in northwest Iran in 275, while he simultaneously led a powerful army towards western Persia. Fortunately for Bahram, the threat from the Caucasus was contained and Aurelian died before he could reach Persia. The Roman invasion never materialized. Bahram I died a year later in 276, leading to the ascension of his son Bahram II (r. AD 276–293).

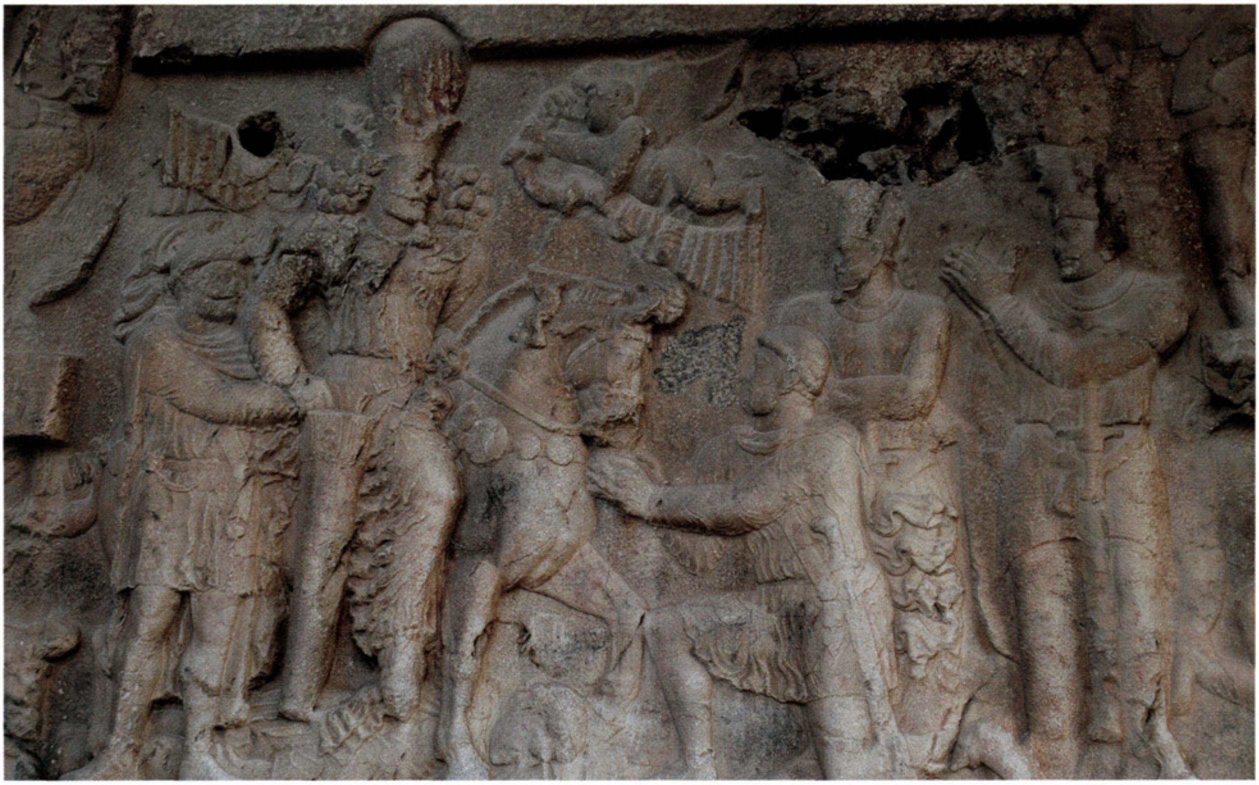
Bahram II, like his father before him, was also beholden to the influence and intrigues of the fanatic Kartir, who by now had gained much power in the court. Having destroyed Mani and his followers in Iran, Kartir widened his net of persecution to include the followers of other Aryan and non-Aryan faiths. By this time the magi and a number of the nobles had drawn closer together,[105] creating an oligarchy that would progressively alienate the population from the Empire over the following centuries. This state of affairs was viewed with considerable alarm by many of the "independent" nobles and members of the monarchy. Hormuz "SakaShah," Bahram II's brother, mobilized the

Sakas of Saka-istan in the east and the Kushans of the northeast into open rebellion. The rebellion spread to northern Persia and attracted a number of the Giloi. Bahram II forcefully crushed the movement and installed his son, Bahram III as king of the Sakas.[106] As soon as the eastern marches had been pacified, Bahram II was facing another rebellion, this time by his Uncle Narses and a number of anti-Kartir nobles.

Bahram II's preoccupation with Narses had afforded Emperor Carus (r. AD 282–283) the opportunity to mount a powerful invasion in 283. Flushed with his recent successes against the north Iranian Sarmatians and Germanic Quadi on the Danube, Carus rapidly reached the capital at Ctesiphon, which he captured.[107] The Romans were very successful, thanks to the absence of the main Savaran forces now engaged in a dynastic war.[108] Carus is then said to have died by "a bolt of lightning."[109] Although it is possible he was killed by lightning, Carus' death may well have been due to military action. The duel seen between Bahram II and an "unidentified" foe at Naghsh-e-Rustam may commemorate a final battle in which Carus was defeated, although there is no textual evidence to support this proposition. Nevertheless, it is difficult to rationally contemplate why the Romans would simply withdraw because of the death of their emperor. The logical choice would have been to continue the expedition: perhaps a defeat of sorts convinced the Romans to do otherwise.

Diocletian (r. AD 284–305) became emperor of Rome after Carus' death. After quickly arranging for a truce with Bahram II, he constructed powerful fortifications on Syria's borders with Persia. Soon after the Diocletian truce, Bahram was faced with a

This panel is from the center of a relief at Bishapur depicting Shapur I's triumphs. The emperor Gordian lies dead beneath the hooves of Shapur's horse. Kneeling before Shapur, Gordian's praetorian prefect and successor, Philip the Arab, begs to be spared. Standing at Shapur's knee, held by the hand, is Valerian, defeated and captured in C.AD 260. Behind Philip stand two important courtiers, one may be the high priest Kartir, and the other, carrying a large sword, may be a Savaran commander. (© Livius.org)



major rebellion in Armenia. Tirdad, an Armenian prince of Parthian origin, had entered Armenia and organized an anti-Sassanian revolt by 286. Diocletian seized on this opportunity to aid the Armenian rebels, and by 288, Armenia had completely broken off from Sassanian Persia after 50 years of direct rule.[110] Bahram II failed to recover Armenia and died shortly after in 293.

Narses and Roman recovery

Bahram II was succeeded by his son, Bahram III, who only ruled for four months. Narses, a son of Shapur I, deposed Bahram III, having marched south from independent Armenia into Atropatene and from there towards Ctesiphon. Before reaching Ctesiphon, Narses was greeted by many Sassanian nobles at Paikuli, in Iraqi Kurdistan. These nobles were wary of the rising influence of the magi in politics and government. They looked to Narses to restore balance to Iran's political power structure. Narses (r. AD 293–301) was crowned king, as commemorated by the Paikuli inscriptions.

With Narses in power, the Empire once again attained a sense of stability. Internally, Narses managed to curb the disproportionate influence of Kartir and his allies among the magi and nobles. With the Empire's frontiers in the east and northeast secure, Narses was able to mobilize the entire army and the Savaran for a renewed campaign against Rome. The aim was to repeat the stunning successes of Shapur decades earlier. The Savaran struck into Armenia and drove out the pro-Roman Tirdad in 295. Narses then overran Syria, just as Shapur had in the 250s. As the powerful Roman defenses began to crumble, Diocletian dispatched his son-in-law, Maximianus Galerius, to defeat the Sassanians. In a repeat of the past military errors of Crassus and Valerian, Galerius chose to engage the Savaran in the ideal cavalry region of Callinicum and Carrhae.[111] Although battle details are unavailable, Galerius was soundly beaten.[112] Roman sources describe the Savaran as having "arrow-holding quivers … each held bow and spear in his hands … the whole Nisean cavalry that fights on the plains was gathered together."[113] The immediate consequence of Galerius' defeat was total Sassanian ascendancy in Mesopotamia.

Galerius rapidly reconstituted his army, and carefully planned his next counterattack. In 296, Galerius led the Romans into Armenia and won a crushing victory over Narses.[114] The rout was complete, and the Romans captured Narses' family as well as a large number of nobles.[115] Galerius' success may be attributed to the fact that he avoided the flat plains of Syria and Mesopotamia, choosing to do battle in the forested regions of the Caucasus most suited for his infantry. When the battle was joined, Galerius' infantry lines must have held against the lance charges of the Savaran. The horse and foot archers must have been neutralized as well. One possibility is that the Roman infantry rushed towards them to engage in face-to-face combat. This may partly explain why Sassanian archery was apparently unable to support the Savaran.

Narses was now forced to negotiate from a position of weakness, which the Romans exploited to the full. In what became the Nisibis Peace Treaty of 297, the frontier was rolled back to the Tigris River, so that much territory in northern Mesopotamia was ceded to Rome; the pro-Roman Tirdad was reinstated in Armenia; and Persia was to have no political influence in Armenia and Georgia. These humiliating terms remained in place for a whole generation, and served to inculcate a "revanche" sentiment among the

Sassanians. The severity of Narses' defeat led him to give up his throne in favor of his son Hormuz II in 301, a year before his death. Hormuz's brief eight-year reign was characterized by his attention to internal affairs, with no military actions being taken against the Romans. It is generally acknowledged that he was presiding over considerable internal unrest just before his demise. Hormuz accommodated the tribes around modern Kabul and obtained their loyalty by marrying Princess Shaheddokht, daughter of the Kushan King KabulShah. The circumstances of Hormuz's premature death are difficult to ascertain. He either died in the hunt or was killed fighting Arab raiders in the south. Hormuz II was succeeded by his infant son, Shapur II, in 309.

Chapter 13

Shapur II: a new revival of Sassanian Persia

Shapur II was perhaps one of the most enigmatic rulers of ancient Persia. Ruling literally from the cradle to the grave, Shapur's 70-year reign spanned the passage of ten Roman emperors and witnessed desperate battles with the Arabs, Chionites, and Romans. The latter, under the leadership of Julian the Apostate, came very close to destroying the Sassanian Empire. Shapur steered Persia through these crises, and also laid the foundations of a powerful learning tradition. That legacy was to profoundly influence the later Islamic, and European, traditions of learning and medicine.

The Arab incursions

The first serious attacks by the Arabs occurred when Shapur II was an infant. The Arabs successfully launched deep raids into Persia from islands in the Persian Gulf. Their primary targets were the southern territories of the Sassanian Empire. The *Bundahishn* notes that "in the reign of Shapur son of Hormuz, the Arabs came and seized the banks of the River Karun (Ulay) and remained there for many years pillaging and attacking..."[1] Geographical factors may have also encouraged the Arab assault, notably the lowering of the water levels to the east of Arabia.[2] Many of Iran's border towns and villages were looted and destroyed, and their inhabitants killed or taken as slaves. Emboldened by these raids, the Arabs even began making thrusts into the interior of Mesopotamia, with hopes of reaching Ctesiphon. The Arab successes were mainly due to the absence of any meaningful Sassanian military response. The boy-emperor Shapur II was surrounded by a large number of indecisive and mediocre *andarzbad* (lit. advisors), who proved incompetent at stopping the Arabs. The Sassanian military machine was certainly capable of at least containing the Arab raids. It is a mystery as to why the advisors of the boy-king failed to mobilize the armed forces to confront the threats.

The Arabs, however, may have erroneously concluded that their successes had been due to military prowess. Rather than vacate the Sassanian territories they had recently raided, the Arabs decided to forcefully settle in southwestern Iran and the Sassanian

Persian Gulf coastline. It was in these circumstances that the young Shapur formally ascended the throne in Ctesiphon. The advisors were pushed aside and Shapur immediately ordered the Savaran to crush the Arab invaders and expel them back across the border. The *Bundahishn* notes that "Shapur became of age and drove away those Arabs and took the land from them. He killed many rulers of the Arabs and scattered many of them."[3] Mounted Arab troops on camel and horse lacked the ability to stand up to the armored knights, especially in close-quarter fighting. Horse and foot archery must have taken a terrible toll on the Arabs, and the Sassanians also fielded a regular force of armored infantry that was trained for close-quarter combat.

The Savaran had little difficulty when they entered the Arab-occupied southwest in the vicinity of modern Persis and Khuzistan. Shapur's Savaran were overwhelmingly successful: all occupied lands were liberated, including the entire Persian Gulf coastline. Shortly after the liberation of the southern territories, the Savaran boarded ships and sailed across the Persian Gulf. Shapur was determined to greet the Arab raiders on their own soil: the Savaran landed in Bahrain, Ghateef, and Yamama, and once again the Arabs were overpowered and defeated, as corroborated by Islamic sources.[4] Judging from historical accounts, Shapur was especially ruthless in the treatment of his defeated Arab foes. One clearly embellished account incredibly states that Shapur had his Arab prisoners led to captivity across the desert on a rope threaded through their pierced shoulders. The Arabs of Arabia's interior, Bahrain, and Yamama, were to remember their humiliating defeats and nurse a multi-generational grievance against the Sassanians, brutally expressed in the Arab invasions of the 7th century AD.

Sassanian metalwork portrait of Shapur II. (G. T. Garvey, Ancient Art and Architecture)

The seriousness of the Arab raids prompted the Sassanian high command to take military measures to protect the southern regions against future assaults. Defensive walls began to be constructed along the western regions of modern-day southern Iraq in an attempt to contain future Bedouin raids. The model for these walls was at least partly derived from the Roman system along the Romano-Syrian borders further west.[5] Shapur's defenses facing Arabia became known as the "*Khandaq-e-Shapur*" (Shapur's ditch). The Sassanians also cultivated friendly relations with those Arab tribes who had earlier entered the Mesopotamian plains near Syria. Of these, the Bani Lakhm or Lakhmids proved to be excellent warriors who maintained the peace along the southern frontiers. The Sassanians soon trained and equipped the Lakhmids to fight like the Savaran. The settling of warrior peoples along the Empire's borders may have been inspired by the Roman *limitanei* system.[6]

Shapur II prepares for war

Soon after the conclusion of hostilities in the south, the Sassanians were faced with challenging developments in Armenia. In 312, Emperor Constantine (r. AD 306–337) recognized Christianity as one of the religions of Rome. Constantine rebuilt the ancient city of Byzantium on the Bosphorus, which became Constantinople, the capital of the eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantium. The Byzantines, however, were referred to as Romans or "Rum" by their contemporaries and chief rivals, the Sassanians. Tirdad (Tiridates), the King of Armenia, followed Constantine in accepting Christianity. This development was viewed with trepidation by the magi and Sassanian nobility. The fear was that the Romans could potentially use religion to drive a wedge between the Armenians and the Iranians. The magi, acting in concert with the nobles, pressured Shapur to force the removal of Tirdad from the Armenian throne in favor of Arshak, who maintained his ties to the Aryan cults and Zoroastrianism. Having achieved this coup in the Caucasus, the magi now initiated a vigorous anti-Christian campaign in Persia and Armenia. The stage was set for a bitter confrontation between Rome and Persia, resulting in the division of Armenia and the Caucasus between the two powers. Nevertheless, Armenia's adoption of a "Roman" religion never severed her profound cultural and historical ties to Persia.[7] Armenian knights were in fact welcomed into the highest ranks of the elite Savaran cavalry up to the last days of the Sassanian dynasty.

The three sons of Constantine shared the throne on his death in 337. The Christian Constantius (r. AD 337–361), who initially ruled just the east of the empire, was hostile to Persia from the outset. From the perspective of war planners in Ctesiphon, a major Roman assault was inevitable. Rome would immensely benefit from the restoration of a Christian monarch in Armenia, as this could diminish Sassanian influence. Fear of a Roman invasion led Shapur to plan for a preemptive strike. He commissioned his military commanders to make thorough military preparations, especially in the introduction of military innovations.

Preparation of Shapur's army

Experimentation with the "super-heavy" cavalry concept could have evolved as a countermeasure against constantly improving Roman military performance. The Sassanian army may have concluded that a heavily armored force of Savaran could succeed in breaking through the Roman lines.[8] The notion of having these troops specializing in archery warfare appears to have been abandoned in favor of a more powerful lance charge and close-quarter fighting.[9] The new heavily armored Savaran were armed with a plethora of hand-to-hand weapons, such as swords, daggers, darts, maces, etc.[10] These troops were trained and armed to break through Roman lines, and maintain close-quarter combat against Roman troops. Missile support was provided by the armored horse archers.

Sassanian doctrine placed the "super-heavy" Savaran knights in the van, followed closely behind and in the flanks by the regularly armored Savaran and armored horse archers. While the new "armored fist" certainly came as a surprise to the Romans at first, by the time of Julian's invasion of Persia they had learnt to exploit their weaknesses. These were limited battlefield vision due to helmet design, and heavy armor, which drastically limited endurance and combat time on the battlefield. In practice, the battlefield merits of the new super-heavy cavalry proved at best mixed against Julian. It also proved to be a total failure against the Hephthalite Huns.[11]

The Sassanians appear to have adopted the war elephant from their Kushan contacts. Shapur II's battle elephants are reported by the Romans:

> With them, making a lofty show, slowly marched the lines of elephants, frightful with their wrinkled bodies and loaded with armed men, a hideous spectacle, dreadful beyond every form of horror, as I have often declared.[12]

Elephants were also used to combat Emperor Julian during his invasion of Persia in 363. These operated closely with regular and experimental super-heavy Savaran in strike packages against Roman troops.[13] The elephant's key advantage in those battles would have been its high platform, allowing for accurate and devastating archery. Later reports by Arabs describe Sassanian elephants entering battle in elaborate regalia and decorations.

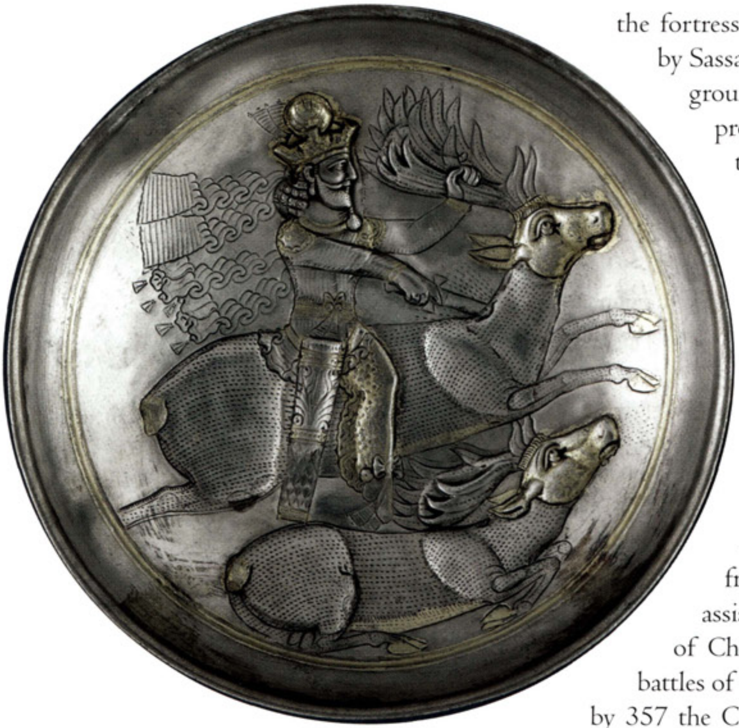
Western historians have often derided the quality of Persia's infantry, basing their conclusions on Greek experience against the Achaemenids. The Roman impression of Sassanian infantry is also negative. Nevertheless, Ammianus Marcellinus does provide descriptions of a heavy professional Sassanian infantry force. While these certainly stood and fought at Ctesiphon, they were defeated by the forces of Julian and were forced to retreat. The Sassanians were cognizant of the merits of a heavy infantry force and made efforts to raise such units to the last days of their dynasty. These, however, could never match their Byzantine counterparts, obliging the Sassanians to rely on their Savaran cavalry as their primary strike force. The most effective infantry to come from Sassanian Persia were the Dailamites, who began to noticeably appear in the armies of Khosrow I.

By the time of Shapur II, the Sassanians were successfully applying their engineering skills towards the use of water in siege warfare. This was vividly demonstrated by the forces of Shapur II in the siege of Nisibis and the Antioch campaign of 540. The Sassanians were not only highly capable hydrodynamic engineers, but were equally adept at bridge building.[14] In addition to military techniques, the Sassanians employed a variety of other methods to facilitate the capture of an enemy fortress. One technique was to attach false and alarmist messages to arrows and then shoot these into the enemy fortress. Spies and sympathizers were also used to collect information, sow confusion and discord, and to undermine the morale of the defenders. After the defeat of Julian the Apostate in 363, Sassanian engineers were able to closely examine the excellently constructed Roman defenses. Shapur ordered his engineers to develop similar defenses along the Romano-Sassanian borders. The Sassanians soon developed an impressive array of forts, walls, ditches, and observations posts all along the Roman frontier, stretching to southern Mesopotamia and Arabia.

Wars of Shapur II with Romans and Chionites

With war preparations completed, the Sassanians proceeded to mount a massive invasion of Roman territories to their west. The Savaran led Sassanian troops across the Tigris, and soon reached the cities of Sinjara and Nisibis, placing both under siege. The Sassanians displayed a high degree of engineering skill. During the first siege of Nisibis in 337 or 338, Sassanian engineers built dykes on the Mygdonius River, dammed enough water to build sufficient force, released the water, and used it as a battering ram to smash one of the fortress's walls.[15] Despite the immense pressure applied by Sassanian troops and heavy losses, the cities held their ground. Fortunately for the Romans, the Sassanians proved unable to sustain their campaigns. A mere two months after the Sassanians had laid siege to Nisibis and Sinjara, Persia's eastern frontier was invaded by the Chionites. By this time the Uralo-Altaic descendants of the Hsaing-Nou were dominating Central Asia at the expense of the Iranian-speaking populations of the region. The Sassanian army had no choice but to vacate its positions in occupied Roman territory and deploy eastwards to confront the new threat in Central Asia.

Sassanian bases in Khorassan, western Afghanistan, and all along the Central Asian frontier had sent frantic calls to Ctesiphon for assistance, to help confront a dangerous invasion force of Chionites. Judging from the timeframe involved, the battles of the Savaran were probably intense and bloody. Yet, by 357 the Chionites had been completely defeated. With the Central Asian frontier pacified, the Savaran were rapidly deployed westwards towards the Roman frontier. During this interlude, the Roman Empire had undergone a profound transformation, and was now divided into a "western" Roman and "eastern" Byzantine Empire. This division had a distinct impact on the development of European culture, religion, and Romano-Sassanian relations. The invasion of the Byzantine frontier was resumed with the full might of the Sassanian army after an interruption of 13–14 years. The Tigris was crossed and once again Sinjara and Nisibis were besieged. In this siege of Nisibis (359), a large ditch was dug around the fortress-city, which was then filled with water from the river Mygdonius, transforming Nisibis into an "island." Specialized ships with siege engines were then used to attack the city.[16]

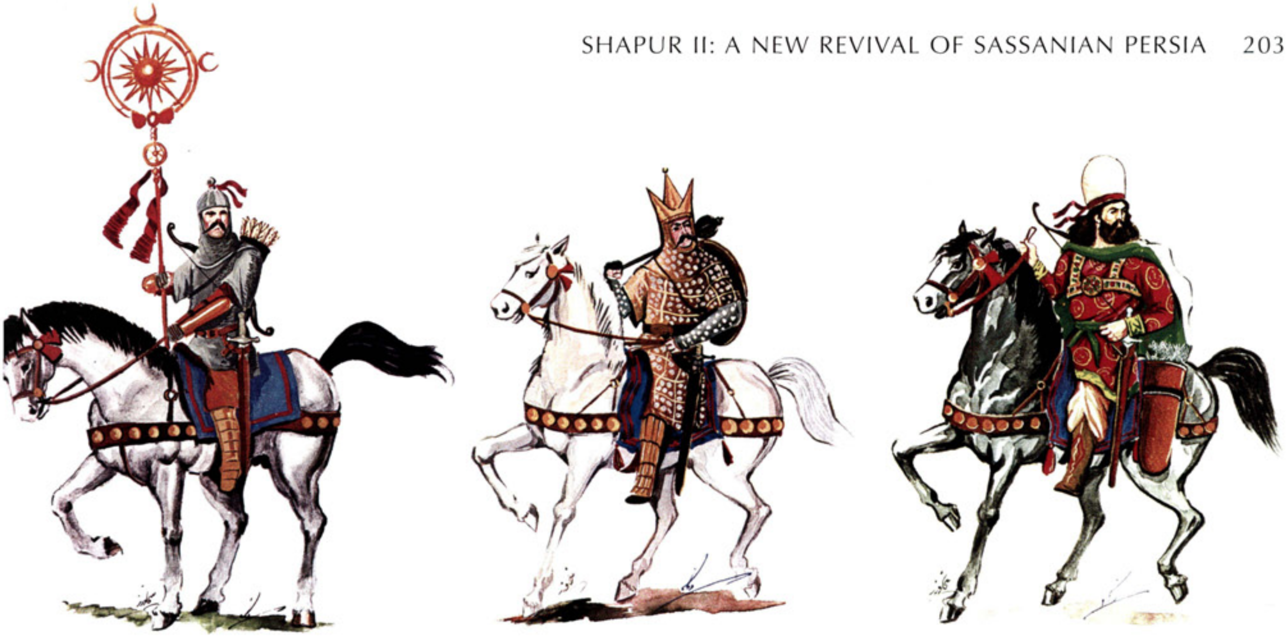


Discovered in Antatolia, this 4th-century Sassanian metalwork depicts Shapur I hunting with a sword held with a Sassanian grip. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

The battle of Amida

One of the Sassanian army's greatest military successes was achieved in Amida (modern Diyarbakr in eastern Turkey) in 359. By this time the region of Gordyene was under Armenian jurisdiction, and the powerful fortress-city of Amida, despite its Iranian ruling caste, was pro-Roman. Amida was vital to the efforts of Shapur II to dominate eastern Anatolia. The capture of this city would expose Armenia to an expanded Sassanian Empire to its west, and block Roman ambitions in the Caucasus. The Sassanian army made thorough military preparations for a major thrust into eastern Anatolia. Shapur's forces had not only pacified the Central Asian frontier, but were now being accompanied by the Chionite cavalry and their king. Albania (modern Republic of Azerbaijan) also supplied excellent cavalry, who were highly respected and welcomed as equals into the Savaran.

Shapur's large army crossed the Zab River on pontoon bridges, and then easily punched through eastern Anatolia. In the meantime, the Roman fortresses of Rema and



From left, horse archer carrying banner of sun in a disc, officer of the heavy cavalry, and commander-in-chief on horseback. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

Busa had surrendered to Shapur's forces.[17] The Sassanian army soon reached Amida and surrounded the city. The Albanians were deployed to the north of the city, and the Chionites to the east. The Saka cavalry of Seistan-Baluchistan was placed by the Sassanian command to the city's west, while Shapur and his elite cavalry faced the city's south. Shapur is described as "wearing in place of a diadem a golden image of a ram's head set with precious stones, distinguished too by a great retinue of men of the highest rank and of various nations."[18]

Shapur and his generals quickly deployed their siege engines. Powerful projectiles were hurled against the city's walls and into the interior of the city, inflicting heavy losses on combatants and civilians alike. Shapur, however, had no interest in inflicting high civilian casualties as this would rapidly alienate Amida's inhabitants, and he dispatched several messages of peace to Amida, all of which were rejected. The Sassanians had no choice but to continue their relentless assaults with their siege batteries. Shapur then led his elite Savaran guards in a powerful charge towards Amida's gates. These had most likely already been damaged by the Sassanian siege engines and battering rams. In this engagement, Roman sources report of how Shapur "rode up to the gates attended by his royal escort, and while with too great assurance he came so near that even his features could clearly be recognized."[19] This action was repeated several times during the siege; however, each Savaran thrust was blunted by a powerful hail of missiles and lances. The success of the Amida defenders at stopping the cavalry assaults is all the more remarkable, given the presence of the super-heavy Savaran, who were equipped with armor that was "proof against any missiles."[20] The width of the city gates would have forced the Savaran to advance in a compact formation.[21] The Amidans probably used this to their advantage, most likely waiting for the Savaran to get within 330ft (100m) of the gates, and then concentrating a rapid, dense fire into their compact formation, affecting even the most armored of cavalry. The Amidans also seem to have had high-power, high-velocity ballistic weapons, discharged by mechanical releases, as hinted at by the description of the death of Grumbates, son of the Chionite king: "a skilful observer caught sight of him as soon as he chanced to come within range of his weapon, and discharging a ballista, pierced both cuirass and breast."[22] By the third day, Shapur II's commanders began to reorganize and deploy their forces for a fresh round of assaults:

> on the morning of the third day gleaming bands of horsemen filled all places which the eye could reach, and the ranks, advancing at a quiet pace, took the places assigned them by lot. The Persians beset the whole circuit of the walls. The part which faced the east fell to the lot of the Chionitae, the place where the youth so fatal to us was slain, whose shade was destined to be appeased by the destruction of the city. The Gelani were assigned to the southern side, the Albani guarded the quarter to the north, and to the western gate were opposed by the Segestani [the Seistan-Baluchistan Saka], the bravest warriors of all.[23]

Shapur II's commanders had in the meantime decided to tighten the noose around the city by a "five-fold line of shields."[24] The cultivated fields around the city were now destroyed, denuding Amida of much-needed supplies. The presence of the tough Gelani hillmen of Hyrcania would indicate that the Sassanian commanders were prepared to engage the defenders in hard hand-to-hand fighting. Sassanian war trumpets then signaled for the surrounding forces of infantry and cavalry to attack. The Amidans were unable to prevent the relentless strikes of the Sassanian batteries, or the volleys of arrows unleashed by the Persian foot archers, but the Sassanians were again beaten back with heavy losses; their ensuing night raids also failed. The Amidans, however, were now faced with a desperate situation. The 20,000 inhabitants of the city had suffered terribly. Amida's seven Roman legions had run out of land to bury their slain comrades. A plague began to infect the city, but was washed away by rain a few days later.

Shapur and his commanders resumed their assaults on Amida. Sassanian engineers installed mangonels around the city, and constructed towers with metal armor at their fronts, and ballistic weapons on top. These were probably designed to distract the Amidan slingers and archers from the attacks at ground level. The engineers also oversaw the raising of a mound against the walls. In the meantime, a commando force of 70 elite archers of the royal guard secretly infiltrated the city's southern walls at night, with the aid of a Roman deserter. The following morning they signaled to their comrades and then caused a distraction in the city to allow the Sassanians outside to attack.[25] However, their quivers soon emptied and the Romans cut them down, and were able to contain the Sassanian assault. A force of Gauls then launched a successful raid into the Sassanian lines.

The Sassanians resumed their attacks, but these were again blunted by the powerful ballistae, archery, and slingers of Amida. The Roman missile troops and slingers, however, were no longer able to operate with impunity as the Sassanian ballista-towers could now direct devastatingly accurate fire against them. Then "round stones [shot] by the iron arms of … scorpions shattered the joints of the towers,"[26] and caused the Sassanian ballista-towers to collapse. Meanwhile, flammable materials hurled at the Sassanian elephants proved effective in blunting their assaults. Shapur then joined the battle shoulder-to-shoulder with his troops, a dangerous action as this attracted the attentions of enemy missile troops. Many of Shapur's royal guards were slain trying to protect their monarch. The fighting continued into the night.

Irrespective of their brilliant and heroic defense, the Roman troops at Amida were doomed. The Sassanian troops climbed the mound, which was now as high as the towers of the city itself. The Romans were unable to prevent the Sassanians from placing a bridge between the mound and their walls: the Sassanians broke through at last. So vicious was the fighting at Amida that the trenches surrounding the city became filled with the dead of both sides. The inhabitants of Amida, now realizing the hopelessness of their position, surrendered their city. Shapur II and the Savaran now entered Amida through the gates that had so stubbornly defied them. The bloody siege of Amida was finally over.

Julian the Apostate: Rome's last major effort to conquer Persia

Shapur II's wars with Rome had resulted in the Empire's western frontiers reaching the same limits that had been set by Shapur I. Equally important was the restoration of the honor of the Sassanian army, which had been damaged after the defeats by Galerius in 296. Emperor Julian (r. AD 361–363) was determined to not only restore the military balance in Rome's favor, but to crush the Empire of the Sassanians once and for all.

Julian was a pagan who had earned the enmity of many of his Christian subjects, and possibly a few of his Christian troops. As soon as he sat on the throne, Julian assembled a powerful military force. Before the invasion of Persia, Hormuz, the brother of Shapur II, had defected with elite regiments of the Savaran to Julian. Arshak, the Armenian prince of Parthian descent, had also defected to Julian. The objectives of the coming campaign were simple enough: invade Persia, capture Ctesiphon, and destroy the Sassanian army, especially its core of Savaran cavalry. Hormuz and Arshak would then be installed as the puppet rulers of Persia and Armenia respectively.[27] The details and tactics of the campaign have been discussed elsewhere, however a number of important highlights of Julian's campaign are discussed below.[28]

Julian invaded Persia in 362 with 65,000 troops. He divided his army in two: 35,000 troops were led by Julian into Persia through Mesopotamia, while Procopius led 30,000 towards Armenia.[29] Procopius' objective was to block Shapur from flanking Julian to the rear and to secure Armenia.[30] Julian may have hoped to trap Shapur II in a gigantic pincer movement between himself and Procopius.[31] However, for this to work Shapur had to be willing to commit to a set-piece battle, a scenario which the Sassanians wisely avoided as much as possible. Also, the vast distances between Procopius and Julian made meaningful coordination between them impossible. The convenient absence of Procopius from the Mesopotamian theater was to serve the Sassanians very well during Julian's campaign.

From Antioch, Julian thrust straight towards the Euphrates where he was joined by 1,000 specially constructed ships, which would follow Julian's army eastwards along the Euphrates. The combined army-marine operations were reminiscent of Trajan's invasion of Parthian Persia nearly 250 years earlier. Shapur, however, did not attempt to challenge Julian's formidable invasion force in open battle. Instead, harassment attacks were launched by the super-heavy Savaran, battle elephants, and the "regular" Savaran, who also acted as armored horse archers.[32] The attackers would simply retire whenever Roman resistance stiffened.

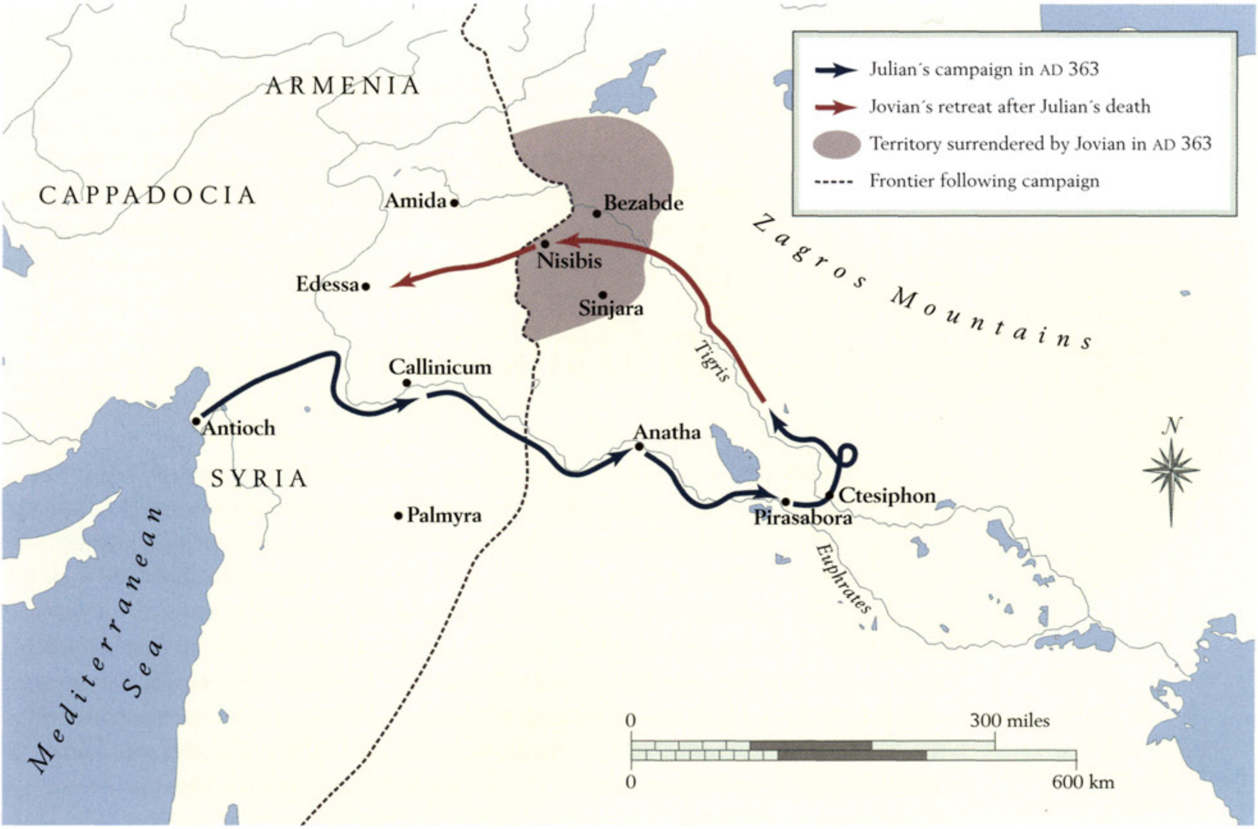
Babylon and Seleucia were easily captured, and Rome's armies stood again at the gates of Ctesiphon. This time the Sassanian high command was forced to engage the Romans in close-quarter combat. Reports suggest that the Sassanians were using a form of heavy infantry that resembled Roman gladiators. The Sassanians were defeated, but withdrew

Emperor Julian's invasion of Sassanian Persia in AD 363 could have succeeded if he had not divided his forces. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

intact into the city. Ctesiphon's defenses proved too strong for the Romans to subdue. A prolonged siege would be dangerous, as the main core of Shapur II's army remained at large, but given Julian's successes so far, withdrawal was out of the question. Julian made the fatal decision to cross the Tigris and thrust straight into the heart of the Sassanian Empire. The ships on the river were destroyed to prevent them from falling into Sassanian hands.

The Sassanian high command finally gave battle at Maranga. Julian rapidly closed the gap between the armies to neutralize Shapur's archers, and prevent the heavy cavalry from launching lance charges.[33] It is not clear how the battle elephants were neutralized. Julian gained a tactical victory, but this was of no avail to the military situation. The "victory" had weakened Julian's forces and reduced their supplies, while the Savaran were still intact as a fighting force. The Sassanians continued harassment raids, and Julian was killed during such a raid on June 26, 363. The Romans had by now lost many men, and were desperately low on supplies, which must have had a heavy toll on Roman morale. Following Julian's death, Jovian assumed command of the Roman armies. Tactically, the Roman position was hopeless as they were now trapped inside Persia. It was clear that a victory was unattainable and the initiative had passed to the Sassanians. Jovian's military choices were to stand fast and eventually be destroyed, or fight his way back to the Roman frontier. The first option was irrational and the second was fraught with extreme risk. Jovian and his surviving commanders decided to end the fighting and sue for peace.

Shapur II made the Romans pay very dearly for Julian's failed Persian adventure. The treaty forced Rome to evacuate five major regions on the Tigris, with 15 major fortresses.



Julian's campaigns AD 363

Julian's campaign in AD 363
Jovian's retreat after Julian's death
Territory surrendered by Jovian in AD 363
Frontier following campaign
ARMENIA
CAPPADOCIA
Amida
Bezabde
Nisibis
Edessa
Sinjara
Zagros Mountains
Callinicum
Tigris
Antioch
Anatha
SYRIA
Palmyra
Ctesiphon
Pirasabora
Euphrates
N
Mediterranean Sea
0
300 miles
0
600 km

Among these were Nisibis and Sinjara. This was especially demoralizing, as it meant the sacrifices of the inhabitants of those cities had been all in vain. The acquisition of Nisibis was of key strategic importance to the Sassanians, as it had been to the Romans since Parthian times. By the time of the Jovian treaty, Nisibis had become an important military base featuring a vast arsenal. Nisibis' strategic position also made the Romans in Mesopotamia highly vulnerable to potential thrusts by the Sassanian army. The Roman position in Armenia was undermined by the treaty, as Jovian practically surrendered that nation to the Sassanians. Rome was to refrain from extending any form of protection to the King of Armenia in the event of a conflict. Had Julian confined his objectives to containing and beating back the Sassanian thrusts, Rome would most likely have been in a much better political and military position at the end of 363. Fortunately for Rome, the articles of the Jovian treaty were only to be honored for 30 years. This demonstrates that the Sassanians fully appreciated the fluid nature of the military balance on the Mesopotamian, Anatolian, and Caucasian frontiers, especially over the course of three decades.

Had Julian destroyed Shapur II in 363, history could indeed have been very different. Julian's survival would have placed the nascent Christian religion in great jeopardy, paganism would have most likely prevailed in some form, and Mithraism may well have survived among Europeans to this day.

Chapter 14

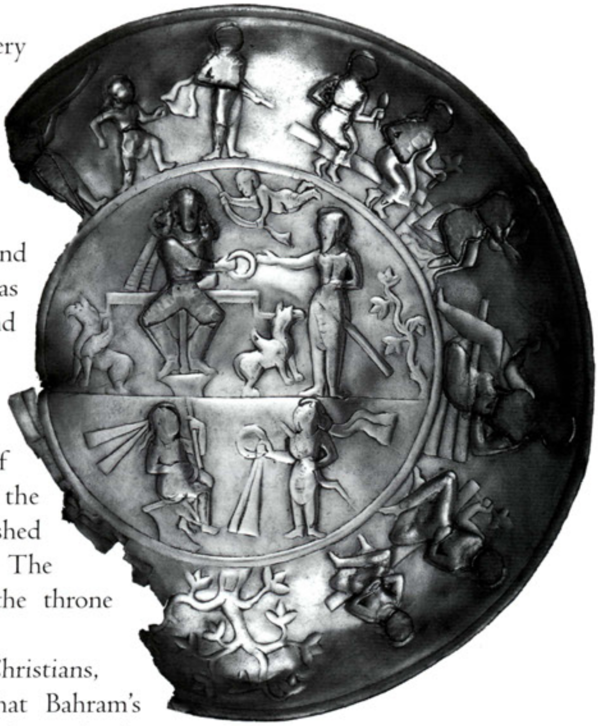
The Tumultuous Fifth Century

The period of 379–420 was characterized by a number of kings who reigned for brief periods. Despite being a weak ruler, Ardashir II (r. AD 379–383) was highly popular with the masses, although he had engaged in the brutal suppression of Christians before his ascension to power.[1] His policies appear to have been unpopular, however, with the upper nobility. After four years of rule, Ardashir II was deposed in favor of his nephew, Shapur III. The five-year reign of Shapur III (r. AD 383–388) was notable for his attempts at reaching a settlement with Rome over Armenia. This resulted in a treaty signed in 384, in which Shapur III ceded a number of Sassanian territories in Armenia. Shapur III was succeeded by his son Bahram IV (AD 388–399), who was known as "Kermanshah"[2] as he had served as the governor of German/Kerman before his ascension as king.[3] While there are conflicting accounts as to his character, Bahram IV seems to have favored the poor and been negligent towards the affairs of the nobility.[4]

Yazdegird I (lit. made by Yazda or God) (r. AD 399–420) succeeded Bahram IV, finally bringing an end to two decades of chaotic rule. Yazdegird was accepting of the Christian and Jewish religions, an attitude bitterly opposed by much of the Zoroastrian magi. Interestingly, Christian sources appear to praise Yazdegird, while some Pahlavi sources describe him as "Yazdegird the Sinful," probably due to his benevolence towards the Christians.[5] Yazdegird is also believed to have married a Jewish noblewoman who bore him a son named Narses. The Emperor Aracadius thought very highly of Yazdegird's character, and bequeathed his son Flavius Theodosius II to the care of the Sassanian monarch. Yazdegird took the prince to Ctesiphon and had him instructed in kingship under the tutelage of his highest *andarzbad* (counselor). Nevertheless, pressure from the court and the magi, combined with the anti-Zoroastrian attitudes of Christian proselytizers, finally forced Yazdegird to engage in the savage repression of the Christians. Yazdegird, however, was careful to maintain his cordial relations with Rome and to preserve the peace.

Bahram Gur

After Yazdegird's death in 420, the nobles initially blocked the ascension of his son Bahram V (r. AD 420–438). The heroic deeds of Bahram V have been immortalized in



the post-Islamic *Shahname* epics. Bahram's exploits in archery have earned him the nickname "Gur" or Onager (wild ass) in reference to his accuracy in archery hunting of these and other animals. Bahram's brother Shapur had unsuccessfully attempted to seize power, and the nobility had reacted by placing a certain Khosrow on the throne. Khosrow was a direct descendant of Ardashir I, and only a distant relation to Yazdegird. Bahram, however, was unwilling to relinquish his claim to the throne so easily, and he had some powerful support, particularly Mehr-Narseh, a member of the distinguished Spandbat clan, who had been Yazdegird's premier minister. In addition, because he had been raised and educated in the court of al-Na'uman the Arab vassal king of Hira, he had the support of the Lakhmid Arabs in the south, who furnished him with a large army trained and equipped like Savaran.[6] The support of Mehr-Narseh and Lakhmid cavalry secured the throne of Persia for Bahram V.[7]

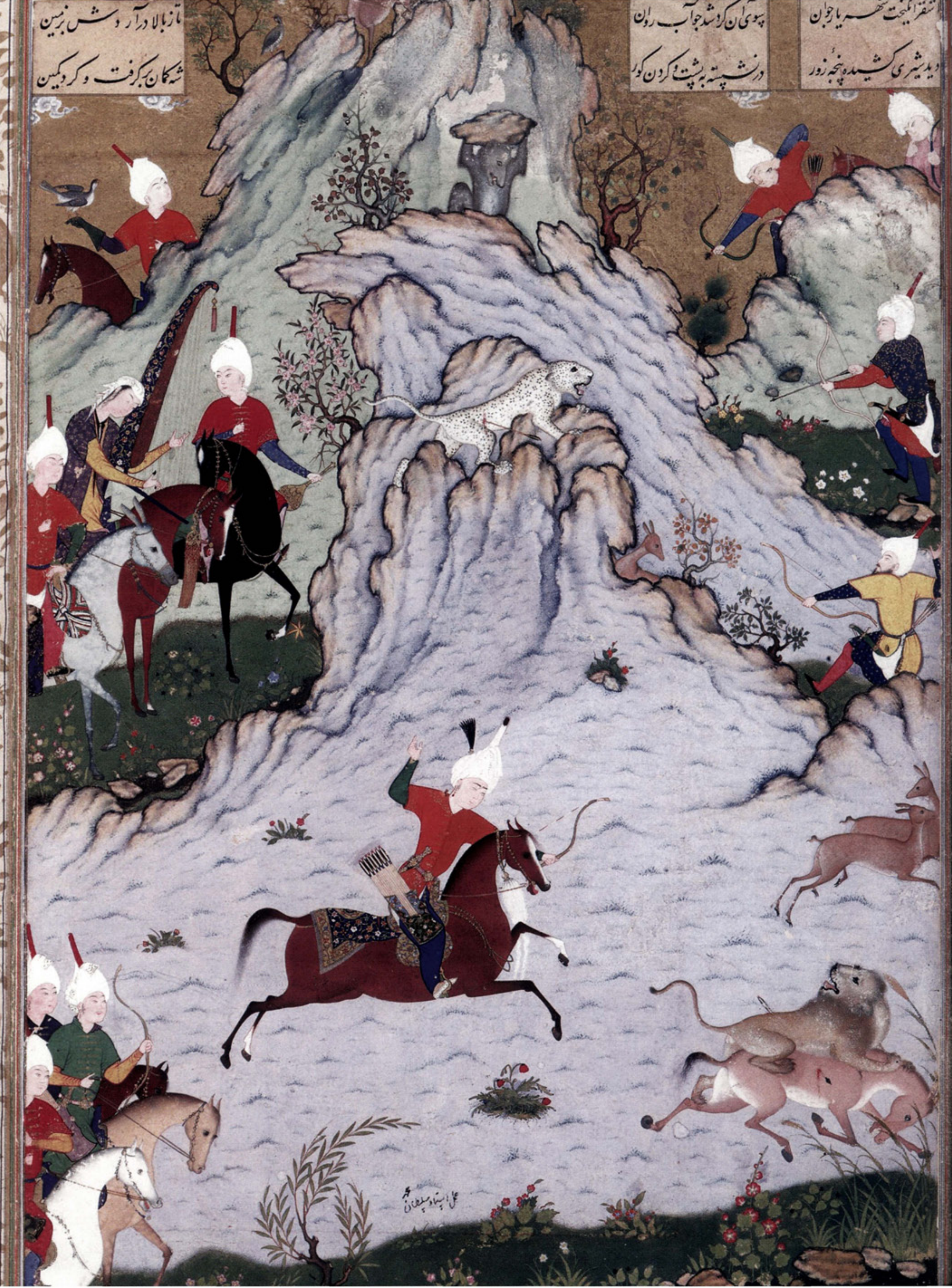
Bahram had pursued a vigorous campaign against the Christians, accusing them of being Roman spies. It is possible that Bahram's "Zoroastrian fundamentalism" was at least partly motivated to win the support of the magi. Bahram now demanded the repatriation of all those Christians who had fled from Persia to Byzantium. Emperor Flavius Theodosius II (r. AD 421–450) rejected these proposals and Bahram declared war. The short Bahram-Theodosius war (421–422) was fought from Nisibis to Armenia, but failed to achieve any decisive results for either side.[8]

Bahram effectively recognized the antebellum status quo by signing a 100-year peace treaty with the Byzantines. Persia allowed the Christians freedom of worship,[9] while Rome was expected to refrain from interfering in the practices of the Zoroastrian-Aryan cults within its Empire. This treaty also pleased the Armenians, who by now were converting to Christianity in increasing numbers. The Armenian patriarch and *naxarar* (nobility) had been at odds over the question of allowing Armenia to become a province of the Sassanian Empire. In the end, the pro-Sassanian naxarar seem to have prevailed, allowing Bahram to dispatch Sassanian governors to Armenia. Theodosius also relegated the defense of the Derbend passes in the Caucasus to the Sassanians. This was accepted by Bahram on the condition that Rome would also provide a portion of the expenses required for Derbend's defense. The treaties with Theodosius bought much needed calm to the Byzantine frontier, allowing the military to focus its attentions on alarming developments in the east, towards Central Asia.

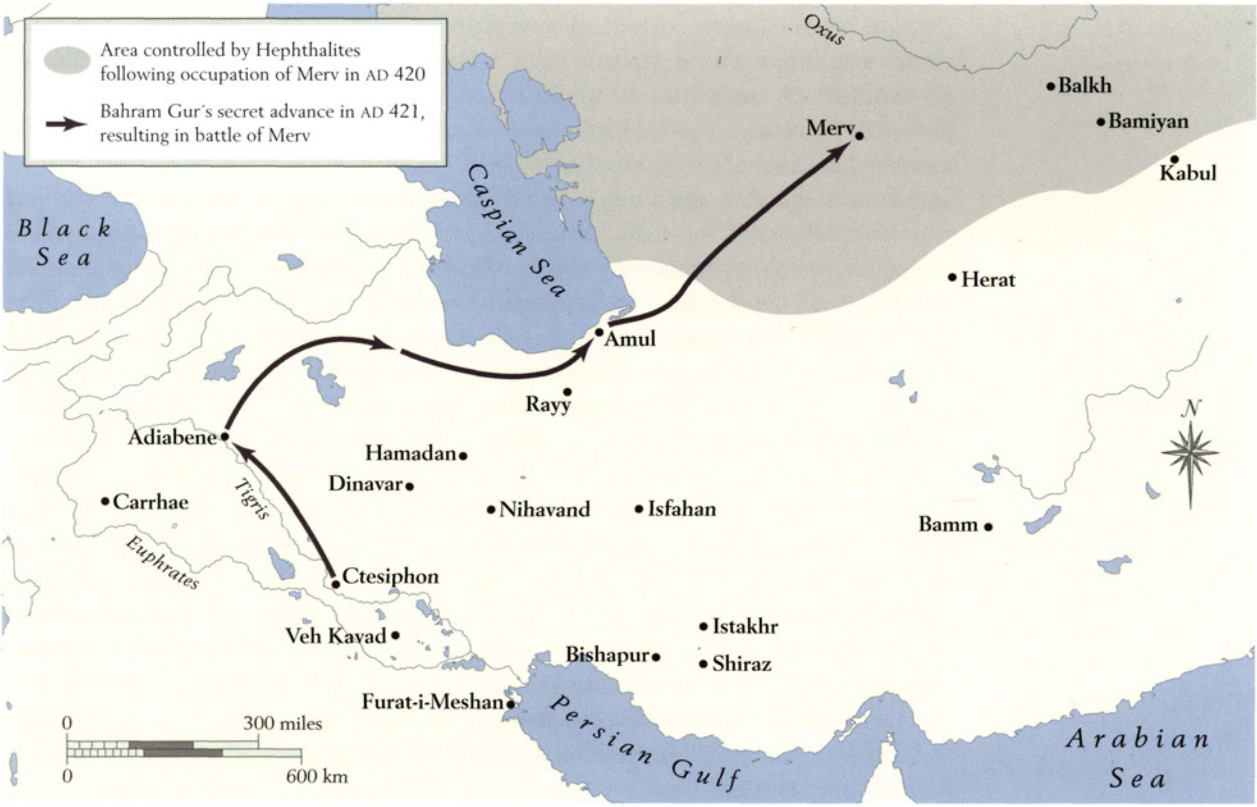
This silver dish was originally highlighted with mercury gilding. It has been suggested that the scene shown in the center is a representation of the appointment of a Kushanshah, or governor, of the eastern provinces, and that the two figures are, on the top, Ardashir II (AD 379–383), who held the office of Kushanshah before becoming King of Iran, and below him his son Peroz, who succeeded him as Kushanshah. The seated deity holding out the ring of authority may be Mithras. He is supported on his bench throne (takht) by two senmurvs. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

The Hephthalite Threat from Central Asia

A new and dangerous threat was beginning to form on the Central Asian frontier along the Empire's northeast: a non-Iranian people known in Persia as the Haiatheleh. Greek historians referred to these as the "Hephthalites" or "White Huns." It is difficult, however,


شنقر انگیخت شهریار جوان
بسوی آن گرد شد چو آب روان
دید شیری کشیده پنجه زور
در نشسته به پشت و گردن گور
تا ز بالا در آردش بر زمین
شه کمان برگرفت و کرد کمین
عمل استاد محمد سلطان

Bahram Gur and the Hephthalites AD 420–421


Area controlled by Hephthalites following occupation of Merv in AD 420
Bahram Gur's secret advance in AD 421, resulting in battle of Merv
Oxus
Balkh
Bamiyan
Merv
Kabul
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Herat
Amul
Rayy
Adiabene
Hamadan
Dinavar
Carrhae
Tigris
Nihavand
Isfahan
Bamm
Euphrates
Ctesiphon
N
Istakhr
Veh Kavad
Bishapur
Shiraz
Furat-i-Meshan
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
0
300 miles
0
600 km

to attribute a clear ethnicity to the Hephthalites. One possibility is that they were a Hsiang-Nou (Turkic) and Iranian mixture speaking a Hunnic or Turkic language. Frye has hypothesized that the Hephthalites were an originally Iranian people who were increasingly dominated by Altaic and Turkic culture and language.[10] Whatever the specific ethno-linguistic origins of the Hephthalites, they were the herald of future Hsiang-Nou peoples (the Huns, Turks, Avars, and Mongols) who would come to dominate Central Asia and launch attacks into Eastern Europe and Persia.

By the 4th century AD, tribal confederations of the Huns had destroyed the Iranian (mainly Kushan) regions of Central Asia. The collapse of the Kushans had led to a power vacuum in Central Asia, which was exploited by the Chionites and the Hephthalites. Hephthalite expansion permanently ended the Iranian and Indo-European dominance of Central Asia. The Hephthalites ruthlessly expanded their empire by first occupying Tocharistan, followed by Badakhshan, Balkh, and Soghdia. The Iranian population of the conquered regions either fled west, or were destroyed or assimilated by the conquerors, a process which continued well into Islamic times. Iranian speakers, however, have survived in Central Asia, notably the Persian-speaking Tajiks, the Persian-Pashto-speaking Afghans, as well as the Badakhshan region.

The Hephthalites' fierce hostility towards the Sassanian Persian Empire was brutally expressed in a full-scale Hephthalite invasion of northeast Persia by 420. They faced very little military opposition as the Sassanian Empire was locked in conflict against the

OPPOSITE Post-Islamic miniature of Bahram Gur engaged in the hunt accompanied by the Savaran. This was designed between 1539 and 1543 for Shah Tahmasp of the Safavid Dynasty. The theme of this miniature is virtually identical to that of the Sassanian metalworks depicting royal hunts. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

Byzantines. Even after the resolution of the Byzantine War in 421, there was no apparent reaction from Bahram. Instead of organizing a military campaign, Bahram publicly announced his intent to embark on a hunting expedition to Atropatene. Bahram's brother, Narses, was to rule as regent in Ctesiphon, during the King's vacation. Narses then sent emissaries to the Hephthalite king, and offered him a vast tribute if he evacuated his forces from northeast Persia.

Bahram's "hunting expedition" was actually a brilliant ruse: he was secretly assembling a small hand-picked force of 7,000 elite Savaran cavalry, possibly from royal guards units.[11] Although it cannot be verified with absolute certainty, the royal guards appear to have been a continuation of the super-heavy cavalry of Julian's time, including those of the earlier-style Savaran of Shapur I's era. The force must have included a crack force of armored horse archers. These were ordered to ride camels, but were also asked to bring their horses, falcons, and hunting dogs with them.[12] Bahram also ordered that 7,000 cowhides and 7,000 one-year old horses be taken on the secret journey east.

Before the battle of Merv, Bahram benefited from an extensive spy network within the Hephthalite kingdom.[13] This is not surprising, as these territories were still populated by Iranian-speaking peoples from Tocharistan to Merv. Through this network, Bahram discovered that a highly efficient Hephthalite spy ring was operating inside Iran, which he destroyed. Bahram and his troops marched eastward, along the southern Caspian coast, traversing the modern-day provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran. To maintain secrecy, they advanced only at night. The concealment of the Savaran's movements from both Ctesiphon and the Hephthalites succeeded brilliantly. When the Savaran crossed Nisa and appeared in Merv, they found the Hephthalites confidently and complacently awaiting the arrival of Narses' tribute party.

During the night before the assault, Bahram ordered the 7,000 cowhides to be sewn, inflated, filled with rocks and hung on the necks of the 7,000 spare horses. The noise of 7,000 inflated skins filled with rocks is said to have resembled thunder.[14] The horses were then released into the Hephthalite camp, causing great distress and confusion, and this was immediately followed by military action. The Savaran attacked straight into the Hephthalite force. Theoretically, the initial and decisive thrust would have come from Bahram's elite guards, who in accordance with Sassanian doctrine would have struck towards the Hephthalite command center.[15] This may explain how the Hephthalite king was slain. It is possible that many of the Hephthalites were "caught on the ground," unmounted and especially vulnerable to the Savaran's lance thrusts. The horse archers would probably have suppressed the surviving Hephthalites' attempts to mount their horses with flights of arrows. The lance thrusts of the elite Savaran and the deadly horse archers resulted in the slaughter of a large number of the Hephthalite host. The bulk of the fleeing survivors were mercilessly hunted down and killed.

Bahram, however, was not content to simply expel the Hephthalites from Persia; he rapidly deployed the Savaran across the Oxus River, into Hephthalite territory in Central Asia.[16] This time the Hephthalites were prepared, but the Savaran again emerged victorious.[17] Facing the total annihilation of their forces, the Hephthalites sued for peace. Bahram then erected a pillar to clearly delineate the boundaries of the Sassanian Empire against those of the Hephthalites.[18] The Hephthalites absorbed harsh lessons from these defeats and returned to menace Persia decades later.

The news of Bahram's success was greeted by rapturous celebrations in Ctesiphon and throughout the Empire. Bahram also seized a large amount of booty and plunder from the Hephthalites. The crown of the Hephthalite Khan was hung as a war trophy in the Zoroastrian fire temple in Shiz (modern Takht-e-Suleman in Iranian Azerbaijan).[19] So impressive were the victories of the Sassanian army that the local rulers of Bukhara in Central Asia copied the coins of Bahram Gur.[20] Some historians have stated that Bahram may have annexed one or two provinces from India, which led to the exchange of musicians between India and Persia. If true, Bahram could have achieved this conquest by wheeling his forces southeast towards the Indian borders, after his victories over the Hephthalites.

Traditional history attributes the death of Bahram to an accidental fall into quicksand whilst hunting onagers, in a region between modern-day Shiraz and Isfahan. Recent archeological finds from southwest Iran however, oblige a revision of this narrative. In 2005, a shepherd accidentally stumbled into a mountain crevice at Pul-e-Dokhtar, Khorramabad (near Dezful city in Khuzistan), which was laden with Sassanian artifacts and human remains. The Iran Archeological Society dated the artifacts to Bahram Gur's era, and they were consistent with that of the upper nobility of the house of Sassan. According to the Iran Archeological Society, this dramatic finding may confirm long-held suspicions that Bahram was assassinated.[21] Bahram's legendary popularity with the common people as reflected in the modern folklore of the Kurds, Persians, Baluch, and Azerbaijanis may have displeased the upper nobility. Also, the "establishment" magi and nobility, originally opposed to Bahram's ascension, had been forcefully overruled by Mehr-Narseh and the Lakhmids. Bahram's subsequent benevolence to the Christians certainly did not endear him to the "fundamentalist" magi. Folklore narrates Bahram's mother as having drained the quicksands that allegedly swallowed her son, only to find nothing. These same narratives allege that Bahram was assassinated by the establishment magi and upper nobility. The conclusions of the study of the Pul-e-Dokhtar site will be of immense consequence to the history and culture of contemporary Iran.

Yazdegird II

Bahram Gur was succeeded by his son Yazdegird II (r. AD 438–457). Rome had now violated the spirit of the Bahram Gur-Theodosius II treaty by building fortifications on the Romano-Sassanian borders, especially near Carrhae (modern Harran). This was viewed as an act of war, as the new forts could act as springboards for an invasion of Mesopotamia from Syria. The Sassanian high command soon made its military plans and the Savaran were mobilized. Yazdegird II also recruited his non-Iranian allies into the offensive, including powerful Indian contingents.

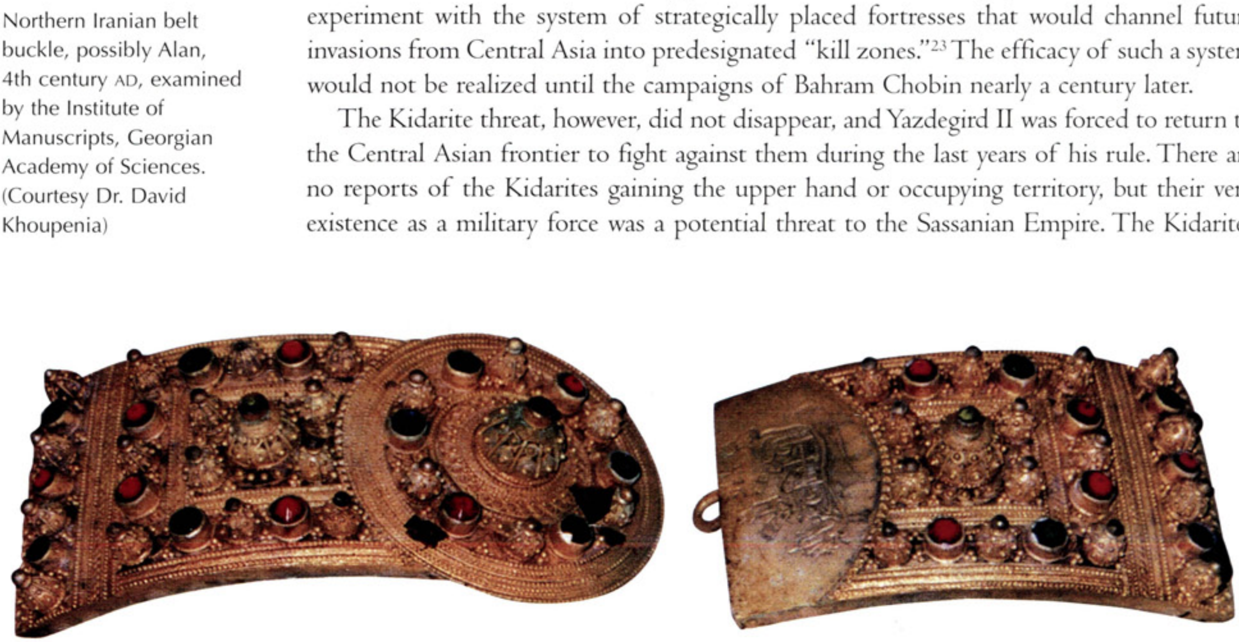
The Savaran defeated the Romans without difficulty, and probably would have inflicted more damage if it were not for the Mesopotamian floods. The Romans had been caught totally off-guard, an indication of their distractions in the European theater. The Huns were by now ascendant in eastern, southern, and central Europe, and posed a mortal threat to Roman civilization. Byzantine preoccupation in the European theater, and the dangers posed by the Sassanian army, prompted Emperor Theodosius II to sue for peace. To that end Theodosius' commander was sent to personally greet Yazdegird and the Sassanian high command. Fortunately for the Byzantines, Yazdegird's demands in the negotiations of 411 were rather modest. The Sassanians simply wanted the Romans to adhere to the spirit of the Bahram Gur-Theodosius treaty in which both sides would refrain from building fortifications along their common borders. Like the Byzantines, the Sassanians wanted to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible. The Sassanians were now facing new threats along their borders in Central Asia.

The new threat from Central Asia: the Kidarites

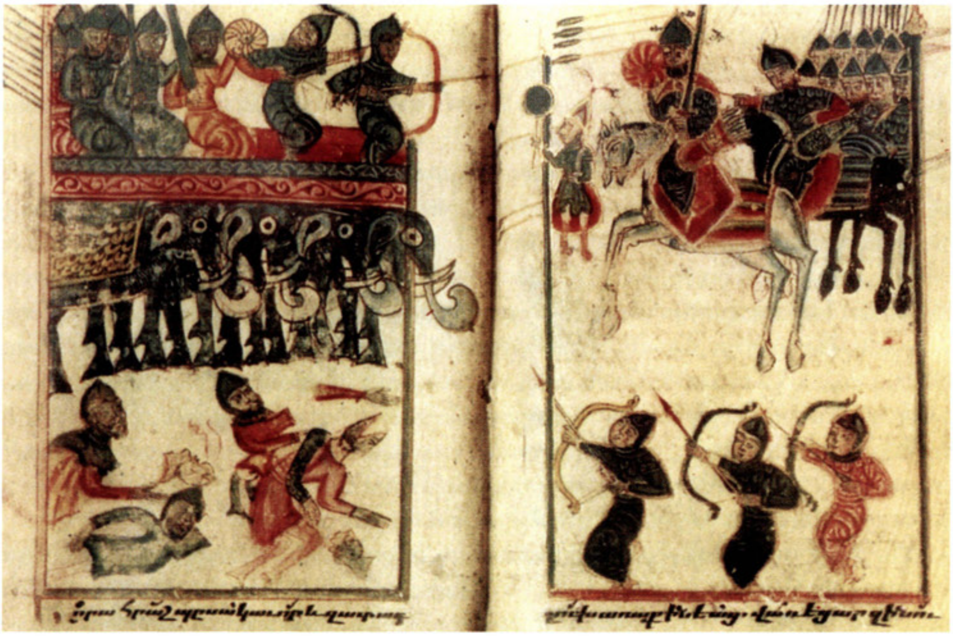
By the early 440s, the Kidarites, a proto-Turkic or Hsiang-Nou tribe, had made dangerous inroads into Sassanian realms in the east, especially around Khorassan. They had also entered Khwarezm, situated further north from Khorassan. The Kidarite presence was unduly harsh, characterized by looting, plundering, murder, and the acquisition of slaves. Yazdegird, the grand viziers, nobles, and the commanders of the Savaran convened at Ctesiphon to discuss the threat. They devised a "gradualist" strategy of powerful strikes delivered over a considerable time. The Savaran assembled at Nishapur in 443, and first carefully built up their fortifications in Gorgan and Khorassan. These fortifications may have acted as launch pads into Kidarite-controlled territory. The Sassanian practice of evaluation and analysis after each battle[22] certainly provided valuable information with respect to Kidarite military strengths and weaknesses. By 450, the Sassanian strategy had borne fruit. The decisive showdown had taken place in the region of Taleghan and the Kidarites were thoroughly defeated and forced to flee across the Oxus River. Although sources say little on the battle tactics, the use of horse archery and lance combat is fairly certain.

After defeating the Kidarites, Yazdegird II proceeded to build a powerful fortress called the "Shahrestan-e-Vuzurg" (lit. giant/greater locale/city locale). This was to be later known as Abarshahr. It would appear that Sassanian military planning had begun to experiment with the system of strategically placed fortresses that would channel future invasions from Central Asia into predesignated "kill zones."[23] The efficacy of such a system would not be realized until the campaigns of Bahram Chobin nearly a century later.

The Kidarite threat, however, did not disappear, and Yazdegird II was forced to return to the Central Asian frontier to fight against them during the last years of his rule. There are no reports of the Kidarites gaining the upper hand or occupying territory, but their very existence as a military force was a potential threat to the Sassanian Empire. The Kidarites



Northern Iranian belt buckle, possibly Alan, 4th century AD, examined by the Institute of Manuscripts, Georgian Academy of Sciences. (Courtesy Dr. David Khoupenia)



The battle of Avarayr: Armenian knights and bowmen defend their Christendom against the Zoroastrianism of the Aryan magi. The Savaran and Armenian knights were virtually identical in armaments, equipment, and doctrine. Interestingly, this depiction portrays Sassanian battle elephants and bowmen; no Savaran are portrayed.

could still launch commando-style raids into Sassanian territories and quickly retire across the Oxus. While the Sassanians were able to redeploy a major portion of their forces westwards after 450, they were probably forced to maintain a significant military presence in the east to contain future Kidarite raids. What the Sassanians could not control, however, was the steady advance of military technology in Central Asia. Developments in Chinese military technology were rapidly transferred to Central Asia, which ultimately transferred to the Huns, Turks, and Hephthalites. These developments do not seem to have attracted the attention of the Sassanians, partly due to a major crisis that was brewing in the Caucasus.

The Yazdegird edict: the Armenians rebel

The Parthian-descended ruling caste of Armenia had converted to Christianity by the beginning of the 5th century, although Christianity did not fully flourish in Armenia until the early 400s, particularly 410–432 when the Bible and much Christian literature were translated into Armenian, and the period when Bahram Gur became increasingly tolerant of Christianity. The Armenians in general remained loyal to Sassanian Persia, yet cultivated powerful bonds to the Christian faith that endure to the present day. The magi were unable to reverse the decline of Zoroastrianism in Armenia. They and a number of the nobility may have objected to Bahram Gur's tolerance, as Christianity spread widely across the Armenian landscape. By contrast, Yazdegird II was an "Aryan fundamentalist," favoring the orthodox magi and the anti-Christian nobles of Ctesiphon. In 449, when the Empire was fully engaged in its final battles against the Kidarites, the Armenian nobles were summoned to Ctesiphon. They were given a stern edict, which called for all Armenians to "return" to the ways of Zoroastrianism. To the dismay of Yazdegird and the magi, the Armenians refused to abandon their Christian faith. The nobles were put under immense pressure to convert to Zoroastrianism, but when they returned to Armenia, they yielded to the wishes of the populace and reaffirmed their Christian faith. Armenian sources report that even the wives of the nobles were prepared to fight against their husbands if they did not profess their loyalty to Christianity. The nobles, led by Vardan Mamikonian, now made common cause with the Christian rebels of Armenia.

Yazdegird ordered his recently arrived veterans of the Kidarite campaign in Central Asia to mobilize for a new war against Armenia. Armenian sources report an overwhelming Sassanian force of 220,000–300,000 (including elephant corps) led by General Mushkan who arrived in Armenia by April 13, 451. While Armenian sources are correct in reporting the greater overall size of the Sassanian forces, the number of Savaran cavalry within this force is unclear. The total number of Savaran in the Empire could not have been higher than about 50,000 men, and despite the pacification of the Central Asian frontier, the Sassanian army must have maintained garrisons in the region. The ability of the Sassanian army to raise such high levels of professional cavalry (as reported for 451) would have to await the military reforms of Khosrow Anushirawan. The large size of the Sassanian army on this occasion is most likely due to the presence of allied units and support troops.

The 66,000 Armenian infantry and cavalry led by Vardan Mamikonian made their desperate stand at the Avarayr fields (or Vartanantz), located in Vaspurakan, Armenia, on June 2, 451. Before the battle, Vardan highlighted its religious nature by reading aloud the story of the Jewish Maccabees. The Armenian force took the Holy Communion before the battle began. The subsequent battle was as tragic as it was bloody, as the Sassanians viewed the Armenians as their Aryan cousins and comrades-in-arms, respecting them as among the best warriors. This may partly explain why a number of the Armenian nobles and generals, including Vasag Suni, deserted to Mushkan during the ensuing battle.[24] The larger army of Mushkan finally overcame the fierce and determined resistance of the Armenians.

The Armenian resistance, though heroic, was doomed, and all appeals for Byzantine assistance went unanswered.[25] The Byzantines were simply too preoccupied with the threat of the Huns, now teeming menacingly to the north of their European territories in the Balkans.[26] Armenian resistance, however, continued, as evidenced by a 33-year guerrilla movement (451–484). The Armenians also allied with the Huns in the Caucasus, who conducted anti-Sassanian raids into Albania (modern Republic of Azerbaijan) through the Derbend Pass.

Peroz's Kidaro-Hephthalite wars

Following his death in 457, Yazdegird II was succeeded by his son, Hormuz III. As soon as he assumed the mantle of kingship, Hormuz III's rule was overturned by his brother, Peroz I who, with the support of the nobles, had his brother captured and executed.[27] Peroz (r. AD 459–484) is generally recalled as a monarch of positive temperament. His reign was soon preoccupied with a destructive drought and famine, which resulted in much death and pestilence throughout the Empire. There were no major wars with the Byzantines during his reign, but he fought three wars against the Kidarites and the Hephthalites. The revival of military threats on the Central Asian frontier could not have come at a more inopportune time. By the 480s, the Kidarites acting in concert with the Hephthalites began to threaten the Sassanian realms in the northeast.[28] The Sassanian command first concentrated its military effort against the Kidarites and emerged victorious against them, allowing Peroz to focus against the Hephthalites. The Sassanians were totally unprepared to militarily engage the

Hephthalites and were defeated, forcing Peroz to cede the strategic region of Taleghan to them. Sassanian humiliation was further exacerbated by Peroz being forced to grant his daughter in marriage to the Hephthalite Khan, Kushnavaz. Peroz dispatched an imposter to take the place of his daughter, a ruse that was soon discovered by Kushnavaz.

The "peace" terms of Kushnavaz and rising Hephthalite power proved too harsh for Peroz to endure. Motivated by the need to retrieve royal prestige and national honor, he ordered his forces to prepare for a new war against the Hephthalites. Kushnavaz in turn appears to have used Peroz's deception regarding his daughter as an excuse to make his own military preparations. The Savaran were probably confident of their ability to crush the Hephthalites due to Bahram Gur's previous victories over them. They were in for a rude awakening.

The Savaran defiantly crossed the boundary set by Kushnavaz, and thrust straight into Hephthalite territory. Procopius has provided vivid descriptions of Peroz's campaign. Peroz launched his offensive with battle elephants (with mobile archery towers), acting as "armored panzers" to support the Savaran. The Hephthalites appeared to be retreating, when in fact they were leading the Sassanians into a deadly trap. As the Hephthalites withdrew, they retired to elevated positions. This was a wise move, as it compromised the Savaran's momentum at delivering the "panzer thrust." Bands of Kushnavaz's cavalry had engaged in a vigorous scorched-earth policy and had simultaneously prepared hidden traps in anticipation of the advancing Savaran. Peroz ordered his armies to halt, exposing them to enemy attacks. The Hephthalites struck with devastating effectiveness, with the well-proven Central Asian tactics of rapid movement and horse archery. While the Sassanians certainly had horse archers, as well as elephant-borne archers, they were totally unprepared to confront Kushnavaz's forces. The Hephthalites were able to defeat the methodical formations of the lance-wielding super-heavy Savaran, most likely with horse archery.[29] Sassanian battle elephants were practically useless as they provided perfect targets for the far more maneuverable Hephthalite horse archers. Sassanian horse archers do not seem to have prevailed against the Hephthalites either. This may be partly due to the Hephthalites' use of new technology, such as stirrups. The Sassanians were unable to counter the cavalry moves of Kushnavaz, and despite determined resistance, they were totally surrounded. The Hephthalites soon trapped and captured Peroz and his entourage.[30] Kushnavaz imposed four conditions for their release. The first was to have Peroz kneel before Kushnavaz and ask for his forgiveness in daring to fight the Hephthalites. The second condition was to have Peroz surrender hostages to the Hephthalites. The third forced Peroz to pay money for his own release. Peroz would then have to continue paying annual tribute to the Hephthalites. The last condition was for Peroz to provide an oath to never again challenge the authority of the Hephthalites. This was symbolized by the humiliating demand that no Savaran were to pass beyond a pillar set by Kushnavaz. This particular article of the treaty strongly indicates that the Hephthalites were seeking to avenge the earlier humiliations heaped upon them by Bahram Gur.

Meanwhile, the Byzantines, and other peoples in Europe had suffered greatly as a result of the Hun, Avar, and Turkic invasions of the European mainland and the Balkans. Byzantine preoccupation with the incoming Hun-Turkic warrior peoples ensured that no military adventures would threaten Persia from her west.[31] Had the Byzantines been free of the dangers of the Turks and Huns, they may have been tempted to take advantage of Sassanian Persia's desperate military position. A Byzantine invasion force would have probably faced very few professional Sassanian troops, as the bulk of these were fighting in Central Asia.

The Empire on the brink of disaster

By all available accounts, Peroz's final expedition in 484 was a catastrophe.[32] The Hephthalites had again devised a dangerous trap for the Savaran. A huge ditch was dug by the Hephthalites measuring approximately 20 *zerh* (60ft/18m) deep and 10 *zerh* (30ft/9m) wide, lined with deadly traps, and camouflaged with wood, soil, shrubs, and foliage.[33] Kushnavaz then deployed his cavalry in front of the huge ditch and waited for Peroz to attack. Just as Peroz engaged, the Hephthalites performed the classic Central Asian tactic of false retreat, across a safe pre-designated passage over the hidden trap.[34] The Hephthalites safely crossed over the hidden ditch, with Peroz in full pursuit. What happened next was a catastrophe: Peroz and much of the Savaran plunged into the ditch and were destroyed, most likely followed by the support cavalry and battle elephants.[35] Not only was the might of the Sassanian army destroyed, Peroz and many of his elite commanders had been killed.[36] Al-Tabari reports of the disastrous consequences of this defeat for the Sassanians.[37] Much of Peroz's entourage and family, including his daughter, were captured, along with many surviving officers, a large proportion of the royal treasury, valuable books, and documents. The Hephthalites had avenged their earlier humiliations at the hands of Bahram Gur. They became the masters of Persia in the northeast, and their military ascendancy also allowed them to directly interfere in the internal affairs of the Empire. This event severely shook the morale of the Empire, and very nearly destroyed the Sassanians. It would take decades for Persia to recover from this disaster.

A number of important military issues pertaining to the Peroz defeats may be summarized here.[38] First, it is very likely that Peroz relied on the proven tactics of his predecessor, Bahram, to engage the Hephthalites. Sassanian military doctrines and equipment do not appear to have changed much between 420–484. However, during that same period the Hephthalites appear to have introduced important changes to their equipment, organization, and tactics. The Hephthalite strategy may have focused on countering Iranian horse archery and the elite super-heavy cavalry. While conclusive evidence is lacking, it seems likely that three main innovations greatly improved Hephthalite battlefield performance. First, the Turkish invention of the stirrup provided the horse archer with much greater stability and control over his horse. That stability would have given the Hephthalite horse archers a significant edge over their Sassanian counterparts. Second, the Avar two-point suspension system greatly facilitated access to crucial items such as swords, quivers, etc. Finally, the Hun-Avar bow was yet another improvement upon the composite bow which may have finally given the Hephthalites the archery capable of penetrating the armor of the super-heavy Savaran.

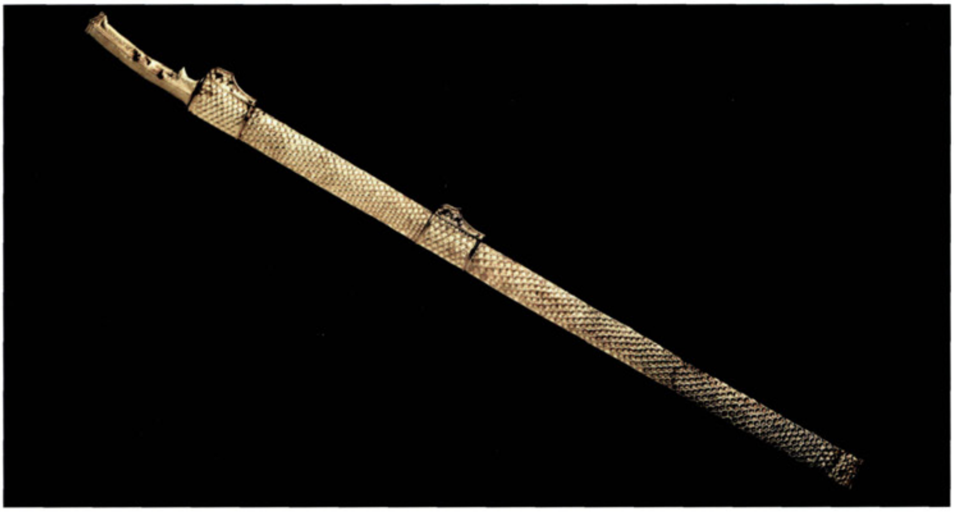
Chapter 15

The Kavad era

Balash

As the Empire tottered dangerously on the brink of collapse, two major families stepped in to restore some semblance of government: Zor-Mehr of the Karen-Pahlavs and Shapur-Razi of the Suren-Pahlavs. The clans virtually assumed power and soon won the support of the nobles, generals, and magi. Through their efforts, the shattered Empire was able to reconstitute its political composure. Zor-Mehr and Shapur-Razi also rescued the monarchy by placing Peroz's brother Balash on the throne in 484.

Balash's first order to Zor-Mehr, a *hazarpat* (lit. commander of a thousand), was to organize a new army to expel the Hephthalites. This proved impossible due to the Empire's dire fiscal state. All funds had been exhausted in the aftermath of the Peroz disasters, and it would take many years, perhaps decades, for the crippled Sassanian military machine and bankrupt economy to recover. This led Balash to make immediate diplomatic overtures to appease the Hephthalites, who by now had displaced the Sassanians in Merv and Herat and exposed the local populations to much cruelty and hardship. As expected, the Hephthalites proved to be exceptionally



Sassanian sword with gold-covered scabbard and handle. (© Trustees of the British Museum) harsh bargainers. Balash complied with their demands for the payment of a huge annual tribute, on the condition that all captive Sassanian military personnel, magi, and nobles were immediately released. The annual tribute arrangement with the Hephthalites certainly alienated members of the nobility, although some accounts note that Balash was planning to renege on that treaty during the last year of his reign. This certainly would have led to another war with the Hephthalites, but Balash was deposed in 488 before hostilities could commence.

Having calmed Persia's northeast frontier, Balash made decisive moves to end the 33-year guerilla war in Armenia, and enlist the support of the Armenians for Ctesiphon. Balash revoked the anti-Christian edicts dating to the last years of Yazdegird's II reign, thereby granting the Armenians the right to practice Christianity. As the Armenians had won their Christian worship at last, they no longer had any reason to fight the Sassanians. In 484 Balash signed a formal peace treaty with Vardan Mamikonian. The Sassanians welcomed back the Armenians and appointed Vardan Mamikonian as the marzban of Armenia.

Balash may have intended to achieve several objectives with his bold overture to the Armenians. First, it reduced possible future Byzantine intervention in the Caucasus on the religious pretext of having to "rescue" the Christians from persecution. The second reason was the strategic importance of Armenia itself as a potential staging area for enemies, intending to invade northwest Persia. Armenia herself had been profoundly influenced by the arts, architecture, culture, mythology, and militaria of Persia. The acceptance of Christianity by Balash allowed the pro-Persian Armenian naxarars to gain influence, a factor that allowed the Sassanians to recruit excellent Armenian cavalry.[1] Balash's pro-Christian reforms, however, may have angered the more orthodox magi.

Kavad's first reign

Balash's brief reign was succeeded by Peroz's son, Kavad, who ascended the throne in 488. Kavad had spent time as a hostage in the Hephthalite court and had soon developed strong ties there. These bonds were to later serve Kavad's political ambitions very well. The new king was aware of the considerable influence of the magi and nobles, especially *Spahbod* (lit. field marshal) Zor-Mehr of the Karen clan.[2] Just as Kavad was consolidating himself in Ctesiphon, the Empire was faced with a new threat: the Khazar Turks of the Caucasus.

By this time the Khazars, a Turkic people, had carved a formidable empire spanning the steppe between the Don and Volga rivers.[3] Like the Hephthalites in Central Asia, the Turkic Khazar Empire subdued or destroyed the last Iranian peoples in the north Caucasus and eastern Ukraine. Many of the earlier Iranian-speaking Alan and Sarmatian peoples of the region had already been assimilated by past waves of Germanic and Hun invaders, as well as Slavic peoples. The surviving Alans of the Caucasus and Ukraine either became absorbed into the Khazars, or retreated into the mountain ranges of northern Georgia, where their survivors identify themselves as "Ir-On." The Russians and the Georgians refer to the Ir-On as "Ossetians."

Just as Kavad had become king, a formidable Khazar army penetrated through the Caucasian passes and was launching punishing raids into Armenia, Albania/Alania

(Republic of Azerbaijan), and Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan). It was quickly realized that the Khazar threat had to be dealt with, otherwise the very safety of Atropatene and Ctesiphon were at risk. Kavad is reputed to have assembled a force of 100,000 men, although only a maximum of 30,000 of these would have been the elite Savaran cavalry, including non-elite auxiliary light cavalry. Although battle details are sketchy, Kavad had crushed the Khazar forces in the Caucasus by 489–490, and managed to bring much booty from that campaign to Ctesiphon.[4] It is very likely that by this time the Savaran were undergoing significant transformations in tactics, training, and equipment. While the Savaran had proven their military prowess once again, the Hephthalites were still ascendant in the northeast. Kavad was careful not to antagonize the Hephthalites, as Persia was not yet ready to face them in battle.

The "socialist" movement of Mazdak

An enigmatic figure by the name of Mazdak had been preaching new religious and social doctrines in western Iran since 484, the year of the Hephthalite disasters.[5] Like the Manichaean movement of Shapur's time, Mazdak advocated a message of absolute social egalitarianism and justice, in which all wealth and possessions would be shared,[6] a viewpoint echoed in the 19th-century communist writings of Karl Marx. Like the communists,[7] Mazdak urged simplicity and uniformity in dress. The Manichaean aspect of Mazdak's messages is also apparent in edicts urging abstinence from meat. The younger Mazdak was a member of the Manichaean movement, and is believed to have been contemporary to the reigns of Kavad and his son, Khosrow I. (Here, "Mazdak" is used to refer to Mazdak the Younger.)

Mazdak vociferously questioned the inequitable distribution of wealth in the Sassanian Empire. This was a direct challenge to the authority and wealth of the establishment. Mazdak's notion of the total equality of all men, including the monarch, nobility, and laypeople, alienated the ruling classes considerably. His reforms were a clear threat against the established "orthodox" Zoroastrian religion, as his doctrines challenged the very theological foundations of the magi. The Manichaean concept of the universe being a symbiosis of good and evil was revived,[8] although without the nihilistic theme espoused by Mani. The role of ritual and religious ceremony was downplayed in favor of personal devotion, spirituality and ascetism. These messages were anathema to both the upper nobility and the Zoroastrian magi, who viewed Mazdak's messages as subversive and anarchist. Even the Armenians were alarmed by Mazdak's doctrines, which were seen as threatening to Christianity, and Armenia's feudal society. Some sources report that the Armenians asked the Byzantines to militarily intervene if Mazdakism was forcefully imposed on Armenia.

While the imposed tributes of the Hephthalites certainly exacted a heavy toll on the population, the resulting poverty, destitution, and hopelessness of the people may have also been due to the corruption of the powerful Zoroastrian clergy and upper nobility. This oligarchy was apparently hoarding a disproportionate amount of the Empire's wealth for itself. Kavad was well aware of this oligarchy and the threats they could pose to his rule. It would appear that Kavad was hoping to break the political power of that oligarchy, as seen by his tax reforms, which may partly explain his patronage of Mazdak.[9] Recognizing the threat to their position, the magi and nobility deposed and imprisoned

Savaran units typical of the 5th–6th centuries AD, wearing pointed "Nineveh" helmets at the 1971 celebrations at Persepolis. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

Kavad by 496 in Anoushbord (lit. the forgotten fort). Kavad's brother Zamasp (r. AD 496–498) was then placed on the throne.

The return of Kavad

Kavad soon escaped from Anoushbord, and sought refuge with the Hephthalites. Kushnavaz gave his daughter in marriage to Kavad, and provided military support in the form of 30,000 Hephthalite cavalry. Kavad and his Hephthalite allies marched into Persia, and Zamasp peacefully yielded the throne back to his brother in 498.[10] Having regained his kingship, Kavad ruled for another three decades (498–531). Once enthroned, Kavad posted Siyavash as the *Arteshtaran-Salar* (lit. commander in chief) in gratitude for the latter's help in Kavad's escape from Anoushbord.[11] Kavad's debt to the Hephthalites also bound him to continue paying them the annual tribute. Meanwhile, the Zoroastrian clergy and the upper nobility had no choice but to submit to Kavad's authority, and to tolerate the "socialist" teachings of Mazdak.

Towards the end of his reign, Kavad was distancing himself from Mazdak and his movement, partly due to pressure from the magi and nobles. Also, the Mazdakites were becoming more "communist," seizing much private property in their near-religious quest for communal ownership. Meanwhile the nobility, already badly decimated by the disastrous Hephthalite wars, were being seriously undermined by the Mazdakites' demands for absolute egalitarianism.[12] The uncompromising Mazdakite demand for a utopian "classless" society now threatened to undermine the very social fabric of the Empire. Kavad certainly wished to curb the excesses of the nobility, but he did not wish to eliminate them. He realized that without them and the magi, the Empire would implode politically from within. Therefore he allowed one of his sons, Khosrow I, to unleash a ruthless campaign of persecution against the Mazdakites in 524–528. Allied with the chief magus or mobad, Khosrow's actions were reminiscent of those launched against the Manichaean movement in the 3rd century AD. The ruthless nature of this pogrom is evidenced by the fact that Khosrow even slew his own brother, Phthasuarsas, for being a Mazdakite. Khosrow's pogroms had more to do with the prevention of possible anarchy rather than Zoroastrian dogmatism. Later, when Khosrow became king, one of his wives and one of his sons converted to Christianity. Khosrow took no action against them, as their worship was not seen as detrimental to the legal and social system of the Empire.

Some of the survivors of the Mazdakite movement may have fled to Syria, Arabia, and even further westwards towards Rome, where they may have joined some "pagan" cults. Mazdakite survivors in the eastern part of the Sassanian Empire may have been absorbed into the Buddhist orders of greater Khorassan. Even as Mazdakism was being destroyed, Christianity was making considerable headway, especially in the western regions of the Sassanian Empire. When Kavad entered Ctesiphon in 498, the Nestorian Christian church of Persia had already gained many Iranian converts. Apparently, the Nestorian doctrine was tolerated by the magi and upper nobility.

Sassanian spangenhelm helmet discovered in Nineveh, Iraq, 5th–7th century AD. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Military changes during Kavad's reign

The Sassanian military machine appears to have undergone a number of transformations in this period. The military experiences against the Hephthalite Huns in 484 had led to significant changes in the Sassanian army. The new Sassanian military machine soon demonstrated its mettle against the Khazars and then the Hephthalites. The Sassanian army was also profoundly influenced by its military experiences against the Byzantines on the western front. Tactics and equipment were modified and improved by both Byzantines and Sassanians, such that by the time of the Kavad-Khosrow I wars with Belisarius, the Savaran and their Byzantine counterparts (e.g. the *Kataphractoi*) were virtually indistinguishable on the battlefield.

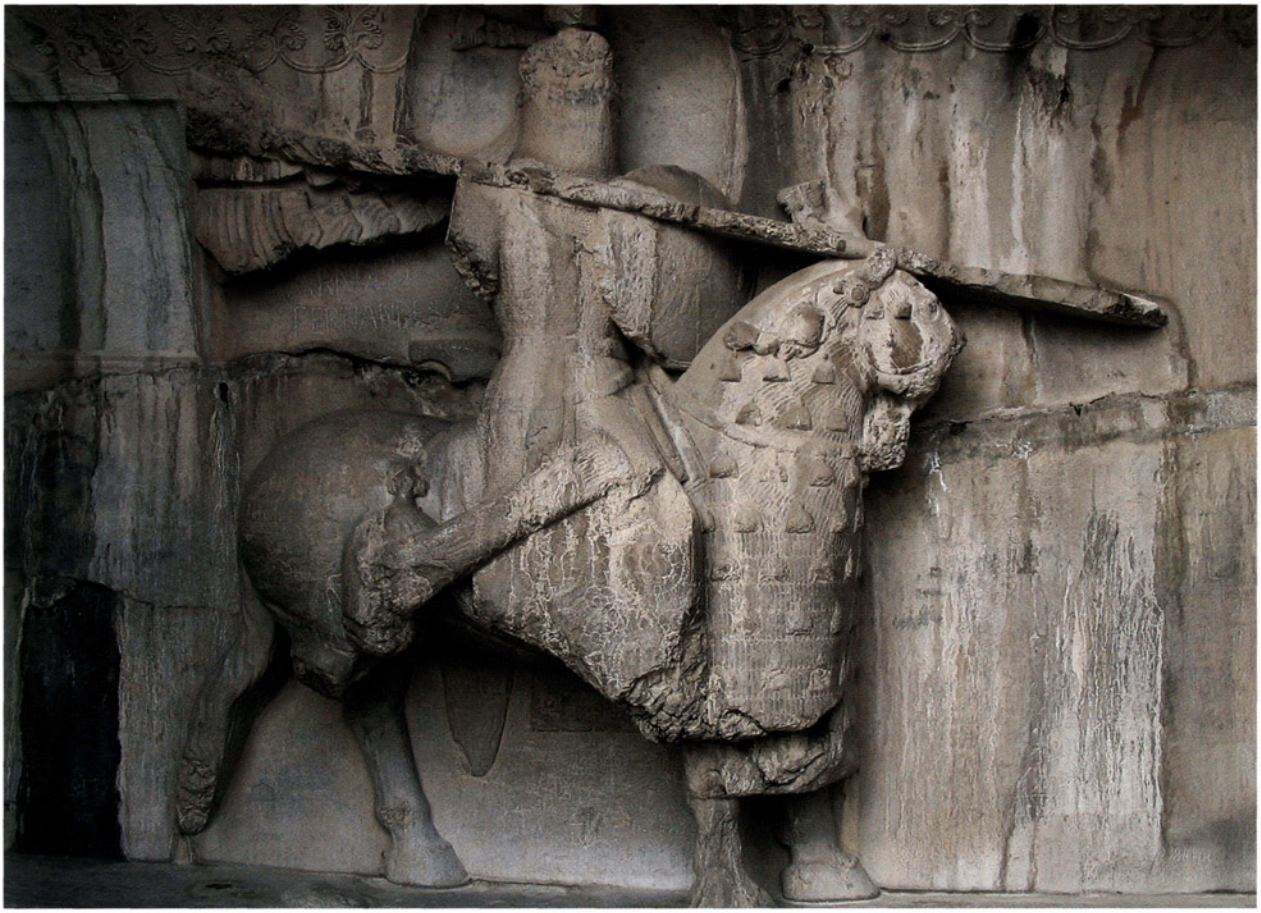
By Kavad's time, new Central Asian technology may have been introduced into the ranks of the Savaran. Although exact dates cannot be ascertained, Hephthalite and later Hun-Turkic technologies were adopted into the Sassanian army, notably the two-point sword suspension system and possibly stirrups. The issue of the latter is hotly disputed, especially with respect to the date of its introduction. Opinions range from those who postulate its introduction in the post-Hephthalite era (Kavad–Khosrow I) to those who date it to the late 5th–early 6th century AD, and those who believe that the Sassanians never used stirrups, citing the lack of substantial direct evidence. Most scholars have now moved away from the latter position.[13]

Roman reports of Sassanian infantry during the reign of Kavad remained consistently negative. Procopius reports the following description of the infantry forces of General Firouz at Dara: "Persian infantry are nothing but a group/rabble of peasants … brought for the robbing of the dead and as servants (to the army). They had no weapons except for a large spear."[14] This analysis proved correct at Dara, as the *paighan* (lit. infantry) simply abandoned the field and dropped their shields when the Savaran were defeated. High-quality professional infantry appeared by the time of Khosrow I, known as the Daylami or Dailamites from northern Persia.

Deteriorating relations with Byzantium

When Kavad consolidated his power in 498, no wars had broken out between the Sassanians and the Byzantines for over 80 years. The western Roman Empire had undergone a series of devastating invasions at the hands of mainly Germanic and allied Alan tribes in the first half of the 5th century. In 476, Rome herself fell to the "barbarians." Byzantium, the eastern Roman Empire, had become the heir of Rome in the Near East and the Balkans. The Sassanian high command may have viewed these developments as an opportunity to extend imperial territory further westwards.

According to Greatrex, the peace was broken by Kavad for two reasons: the Hephthalites and the threat of starvation in the Sassanian Empire.[15] The incessant Hephthalite demands for heavy annual tribute had bankrupted the state treasury. Lack of funds had stopped subsidies for the failing agricultural sector, a situation which, if unchecked, would lead to widespread famine. Kavad now sent embassies to Constantinople requesting funds. The Byzantines had financially supported the fortification of the region, and the building of three cities in the Caucasus to act as "large frontier military bases."[16] The Byzantines, however, only agreed to provide loans to Kavad, who was demanding condition-free payments. Byzantium was probably unwilling to unchain Sassanian Persia's tributary status to the Hephthalites, as this conveniently weakened the former in favor of the Byzantines.



This carving at Tagh-e-Bostan shows a late Sassanian cavalryman fighting with fixed lance. (© Livius.org)

Kavad now faced very limited choices. If he simply did nothing, he would have to answer to the Hephthalites and witness the starvation of the Empire's populace. His final decision was to raid and plunder the Roman cities west of the Empire.[17] He hoped the plunder would subsidize the Hephthalite tribute and help alleviate the dire agricultural situation. The Byzantines, anticipating war, began to intensify the build-up of their fortifications along the Euphrates, as well as the key fortress-cities of Dara and Nisibis.

Kavad finally launched a full-scale invasion of Byzantine territories during the rule of Emperor Anastasius (r. AD 491–518) in August 502. This initiated what historians refer to as the First Byzantine-Persian War. The Sassanian invasion force, which Kavad led in person, was relatively small and spearheaded by the elite Savaran cavalry. The city of Theodosiopolis (modern Erzerum in eastern Turkey) fell to Kavad's Savaran.[18] This forced the Byzantines to make their stand at Amida (modern Diyarbakr). According to Procopius, Kavad's initial offensives against the city were repelled by the defenders and the Sassanian siege engines there were destroyed.[19] Facing determined resistance, Kavad was about to withdraw when the city's citizens began taunting and ridiculing the Sassanians. Ironically, these actions ensured the city's collapse. The magi exhorted the Savaran to continue the battle and Kavad's generals had the entire invasion force surround the city. Reconnaissance teams found an old entrance below one of Amida's towers, hidden by rocks. Kavad rapidly exploited this opening and the Savaran broke into the city, which fell after bitter hand-to-hand fighting by January 503.[20] This ended Amida's 80-day siege.

The Byzantines, however, were far from defeated. General Areobindus assembled a powerful army, the size of which had not been seen since the invasions of Emperor Julian in 363. Areobindus successfully attacked the Sassanians at Nisibis and captured the city,[21] but Kavad soon forced Areobindus out.[22] By August 503, Kavad, now based in Nisibis, launched a new offensive. The Byzantines responded by dispatching generals Patricius and Hypatius to join Areobindus at Tur Abdin. The forces failed to link up, however, obliging Areobindus to withdraw to the west. Meanwhile, generals Patricius and Hypatius continued to march into the Tur Abdin region to confront the Sassanians. Kavad's Savaran decisively defeated both generals at Tur Abdin and forced them to withdraw.[23] This allowed Kavad to push to Constantia, where the city's Jewish inhabitants unsuccessfully tried to aid the Sassanians. Kavad failed to capture the city, but did manage to secure some provisions from a number of its citizens.[24] The next target was Edessa, which Kavad again failed to capture. General Areobindus, who was now in charge of defending Edessa, flatly refused Kavad's request for 10,000 pounds of gold. Kavad made a final effort at Osrhoene but failed, despite some successes by elements of the Savaran and their Arab Lakhmid allies. In the meantime, the new Lakhmid king, al-Mundhir, was launching raids into Palestine.

By the summer of 503, Emperor Anastasius had sent more reinforcements, which soon gathered under General Patricius at Melitene. Patricius marched towards Amida and besieged the city. Meanwhile, a Sassanian relief force sent against Patricius was soundly beaten. Another Roman force was assembled at Resaina, and was soon led by General Celer towards Amida in the spring of 504. This was to support Patricius' forces still besieging the city. Kavad had now withdrawn to deal with a Hun incursion through the Caucasus. The Sassanian garrison at Amida, however, continued to hold out. The Byzantines, who now enjoyed numerical superiority, devised a two-pronged strategy, keeping up the pressure at Amida while Areobindus and Celer made incursions into Sassanian territory.[25] This proved too much for Kavad, who now sent one of his commanders to negotiate the surrender of Amida and arrange peace terms with the Byzantines.

The Huns had taken full advantage of the Sassanian military preoccupation with Byzantium, expanding further into the Caucasus, and attacking Persia from the northwest. Kavad fought the Huns for ten years. There is very little information on these wars, but the final outcome was that Kavad ejected the Huns out of Atropatene and the northwestern regions of the Empire.

Iberia (modern Republic of Georgia) defected to the Byzantines by 524–525. General Belisarius fought an inconclusive war in Sassanian Armenia, possibly as a way of distracting Sassanian military attention away from Iberia. The Byzantines, led by General Libelarius, launched an attack into the Beth Arabaye region, with the intent of capturing the fortress-city of Nisibis. The operation was a total failure and Libelarius' forces were repelled with heavy losses. By 527, Kavad and his Lakhmid allies were engaged in border skirmishes against the Byzantines along the Mesopotamian borders. The new Roman Emperor Justinian (r. AD 527–565) placed Belisarius in overall command of the operations against Persia. Belisarius was an outstanding commander who is known for his brilliant successes in Africa and Europe. He entered the Syrian-Mesopotamian theater, but was decisively defeated in the desert battle of Thanuris in 528, where Belisarius' cavalry charged straight into concealed Sassanian ditches.[26] Belisarius proved his mettle at the battle of Dara two years later, where he prepared a ditch manned by Byzantine infantry. The cavalry were placed on the flanks of the ditch. The Byzantine force is reported at 25,000 men. A Sassanian force of 40,000 cavalry, led by General Firouz, advanced and camped some distance in front of Belisarius' army. The first day saw only a sudden, brief Savaran charge, which may have been for the purposes of evaluating Belisarius' cavalry.

The second day, Firouz divided his forces into two parts; one kept in reserve to relieve the other as the battle progressed. The Sassanians opened the battle in the afternoon with a massive archery barrage in which a large number of missiles literally darkened the sky;[27] a description identical to Greek accounts of Achaemenid archery at Marathon in 490. After the exhaustion of missiles, Firouz unleashed a successful lance thrust into Belisarius' left wing, which collapsed with heavy losses. However, a trap was sprung from the Byzantine right flank, which sliced into the Savaran, killing 3,000. Firouz now placed the Zhayedan (Immortals) on the Sassanian left flank, which then attacked Belisarius' right flank. The attack appeared to be making headway and was inflicting significant casualties; however, an attack at the Zhayedan's right effectively trapped the force inside Byzantine lines. Despite the hopelessness of their situation, the Zhayedan had to be destroyed to the last man. Firouz now realized that the battle was lost and the Sassanians retreated, suffering further losses. The core of the Savaran remained intact, and most of the casualties were the low-quality paighan.

The Byzantines scored another major success, this time against a mainly non-Iranian force of 30,000 auxiliary cavalry led by Mehr-Mehroe, who was attempting to cut off Iberia from the Romans. A number of pro-Persian Armenians and Turkic Sabirs had joined Mehr-Mehroe. The decisive engagement occurred at the city of Sattala, in the eastern Caucasus. In this battle, a massive Central Asian style cavalry duel ended with Mehr-Mehroe's defeat and the capture of a Sassanian battle standard. Mehr-Mehroe's Armenian allies defected to the Romans, while the battered remnants of the Sassanian army retreated back to Persia. This engagement proved very costly for Kavad as it led to the loss of Pharangium, a major gold mining region in the Caucasus.[28]

Belisarius, however, proved unable to repeat his success at Dara; he fought another engagement at Callinicum (531) in Commagene (eastern Turkey) along the Euphrates River. Belisarius' army faced an all-cavalry force of the Savaran and Lakhmid Arab allies.[29] At Callinicum, Sassanian general Azarethes distracted Belisarius by launching attacks towards the center. This allowed Azarethes, supported by Lakhmid Arab warriors, to strike the unsuspecting Belisarius at his right flank, and crush the weak link in Belisarius' battle order, the Ghassanid Arabs and the Lycaonian infantry. Belisarius put up a stout defense, which allowed him and the remnants of his forces to escape across the Euphrates.

In 531, soon after the conclusion of hostilities with Justinian, Kavad died at the age of 82. During his reign Persia stabilized the northeastern frontier with the Hephthalites, defeated the Khazars, and fought the Byzantines to a draw. It was during Kavad's reign that the Sassanian military recovered from its shattering defeats in 484, and introduced a number of crucial changes to its equipment and tactics. It was these that allowed Kavad's son and successor, Khosrow I, to introduce the well-known military reforms of the mid-6th century AD. Although the Mazdakite movement had been seemingly crushed by Kavad and his son Khosrow I, the egalitarian ideals of that movement were never forgotten by the common population of the Empire.

Chapter 16

Khosrow I, renaissance and revival

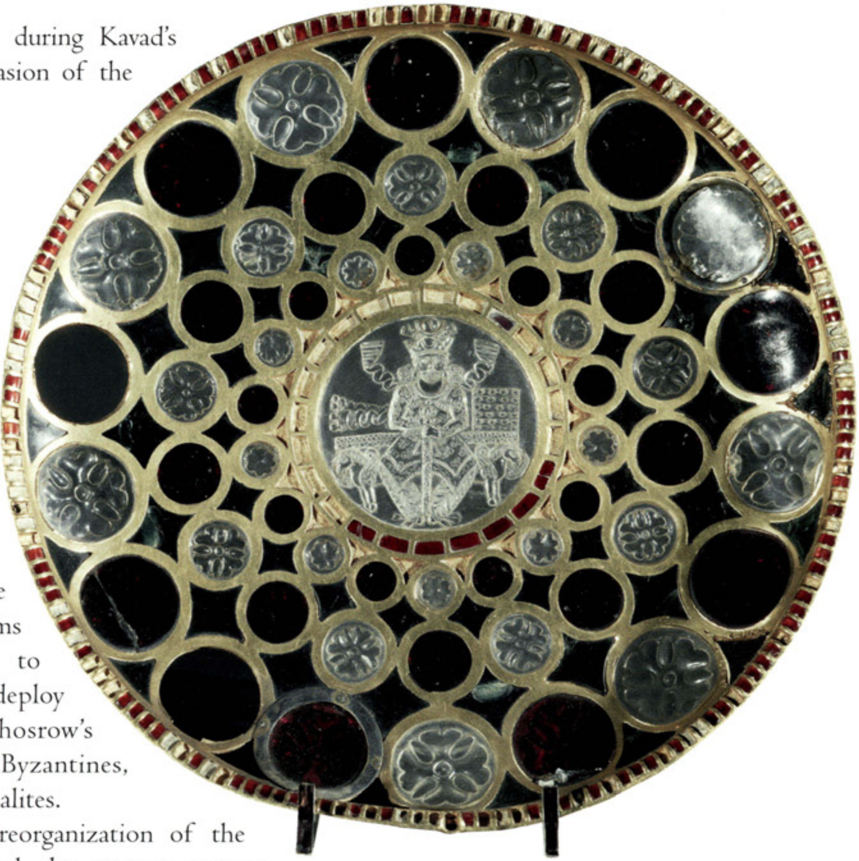
Khosrow I (r. AD 531–579), also known as Anushirawan (lit. He of the Immortal Soul), ascended the throne at the end of his father's reign. Benjamin cites the Khosrow Anushirawan era as the "Augustan period of Persian history."[1] Despite the fame, splendor, and success of his rule, Khosrow was obliged to secure his throne with intrigue and bloodshed. At first, it was Kaoos, or Kavoos, the eldest son of Kavad, who seemed most likely to succeed as king. Kavad's formal will, however, had named Khosrow as his successor. This may perhaps be attributed to the personal wiles and court machinations of Khosrow's mother. The magi were also impressed with Khosrow, who had decisively crushed Mazdak's followers. Mazdak was finally caught by Khosrow, who put him and tens of thousands of his followers to death. A number of noblemen who feared Khosrow threw their support before Kavad's second son Zamis. Khosrow duly executed his surviving brothers, uncle, and all their male offspring. Only Prince Kavad survived, by fleeing to Constantinople. General Chanarang, who had assisted the Prince's escape, was also executed.

Despite Khosrow's bloody accession, his rule was to greatly benefit the Sassanian Empire and its populace. Khosrow introduced major reforms to the legal system. Justice was now managed with objective discrimination and penalties were executed in proportion to the offense. Serious attempts were also made to reform the burgeoning bureaucracy. The objective was to establish a system that rewarded and promoted officials fairly, in accordance with merit and quality of professional service. Western historians generally agree that Khosrow's system of legal administration and government was of great benefit to the peoples of the Empire. It must be noted, however, that despite great strides, the reforms were not entirely implemented, as many of the nobility among the feudal landlords retained much of their power up to the days of the Islamic conquests. Nevertheless, it was Khosrow's system that was inherited by the Arabs and passed onto the later Islamic caliphates.

Khosrow's reign witnessed a powerful artistic, commercial, and architectural renaissance. Many of Persia's arts and technical achievements were to spread to China, the Far East, and Europe. That process was to continue long after the fall of the Sassanians. Learning and scholarship were vigorously promoted. Relations with the Byzantines were essentially a continuation of the rivalries witnessed during Kavad's reign, and were to endure until the invasion of the Muslim Arabs in the 630s.

The military reforms of Khosrow I

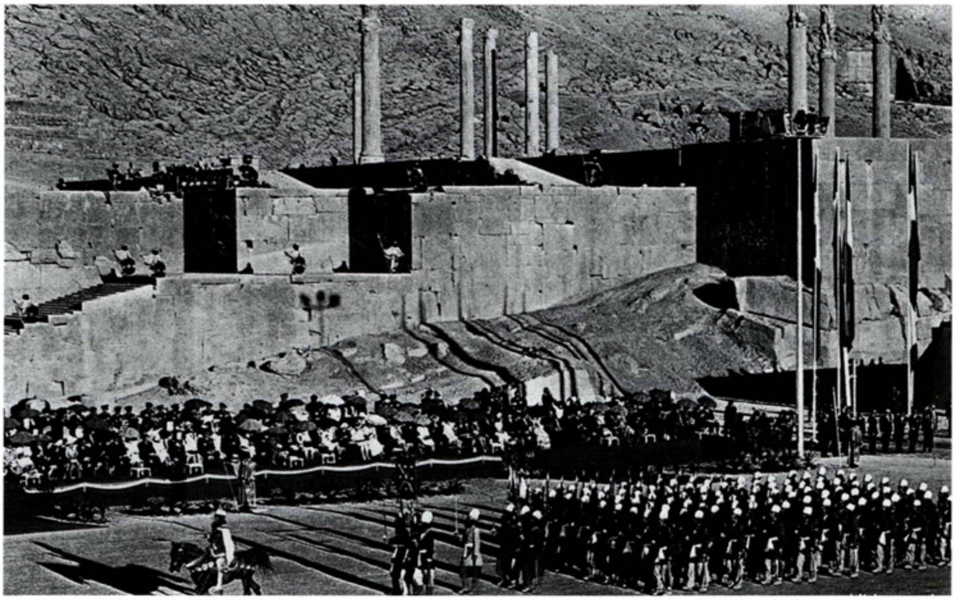
Reforms in military equipment and tactics already underway in Kavad's reign were rationalized by the time of Khosrow.[2] Khosrow's military reforms laid the basis of a powerful army which was capable of consistently defending the Empire's frontiers; a process which ensured commercial and social stability, allowing cultural achievements to take root in the Empire. Khosrow's reforms vastly improved the Empire's ability to fight on several fronts, and to rapidly deploy military forces to vital theaters. Khosrow's army performed well against the Byzantines, Khazars, Arabo-Ethiopians, and Hephthalites.



The "Cup of Khosrow," of gold, rock crystal, and garnet. The central rock crystal medallion shows Khosrow I seated on a throne supported by winged horses. (akg-images/ Erich Lessing)

One of the key reforms was the reorganization of the command structure. Khosrow replaced the satrapy system, which was costly and inefficient, with four major bureaucratic and military zones: Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf–southwest Iran. Khosrow then replaced the office of a single commander with four regional ones, one for each military zone. This reorganization greatly rationalized the Empire's limited resources for defense. The "quatro" system also increased the efficiency of administering a vast, multiregional, multilingual, and multiracial empire.

The inordinate power of the nobility over military affairs was a major problem inherited from the Parthians. Elitism in particular, imposed severe limitations on recruitment. Only the top "Aryan" nobles were permitted to serve in the Savaran cavalry, and this led to a chronic shortage of high-quality men for the Savaran. This meant that the Sassanians were ill-suited to enter a prolonged war of attrition against Rome or the Turko-Huns of Central Asia. Khosrow introduced new reforms in recruitment to help alleviate the Empire's manpower shortage. The *dehkan* (petty nobility and smaller landowners) were now allowed to serve in the elite Savaran cavalry. The dehkans proved very loyal to the new centralized military, and they also acted as provincial tax collectors and administrators on behalf of Ctesiphon. While Khosrow certainly managed to increase the numbers of Savaran cavalry, he could do little to alleviate the Empire's small population base, especially in relation to Rome. The Empire simply could not afford to suffer large battlefield losses of professional troops over a prolonged period. The Byzantines had the advantage of being able to recruit from a large pool of tough



Dailamite infantry units led by the unit's Savaran commander, and soldier carrying the Kaveh standard at the 1971 celebrations at Persepolis. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

Anatolian, mainland Greek, and Balkan troops, and could replenish losses over a relatively short period of time.

Military inspections became much more thorough after the reforms of Khosrow. These would now last up to 40 days, with the King himself subject to critical review.[3] Training regimens were affected as a result, although more archival research is required to investigate that process. Post-Sassanian epics (e.g. *Shahname* of Firdowsi) frequently state that the Savaran had to be highly trained in riding and the use of weapons. Details of training among the dehkans is more clear, and it is almost certain that this training was virtually identical to that of the "upper Aryan" *azadan* knights.[4] The sons of the dehkans were now ordered by the King to undergo rigorous military training from an early age: the first stage on the dehkhans' estate, the late stage at the royal training grounds of Ctesiphon. The instructors of the royal academy were veterans of past wars, who passed their valuable knowledge to the next generation of the Savaran. Previous training in horsemanship, archery, mace, and lance fighting were perfected, and training also included *Shamshir-Wazig* sword training and other forms of martial arts. Once training was completed, the young warrior would be formally inaugurated and welcomed into the ranks of the Savaran. Nevertheless, training was only complete when the recruit had successfully proven his mettle on the battlefield, after which he would be formally awarded a *basu-band* (a ceremonial armband, not to be confused with the ring-armor of the same name) and the *kamar-band* (decorated belt).

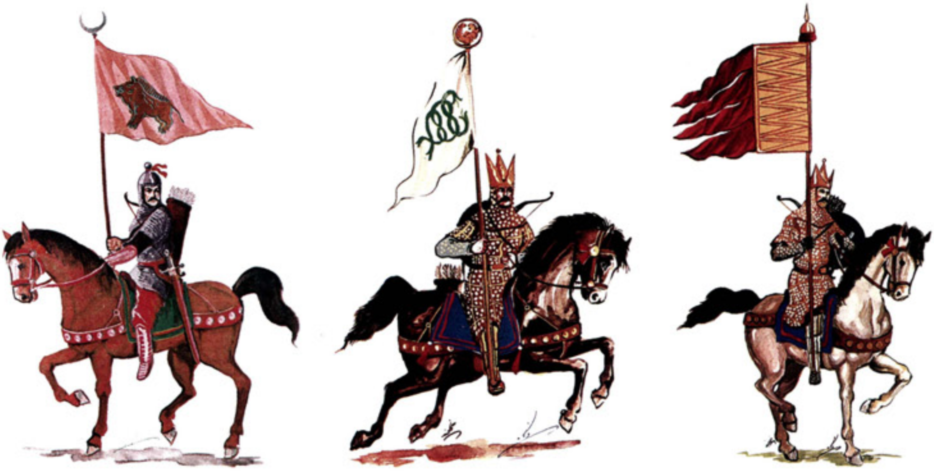
Khosrow's tax reforms allowed the government to gain greater control over the military, and confront the problem of fiscal waste in the military sector. These reforms also aimed to reduce the influence of the great feudal landowners and the magi. A persistent problem had been the tendency by corrupt government officials to rob state revenues for personal benefit. This not only increased the hardship of the people, but also depleted vital funds required for military affairs. This may explain, in part, why Persia took as long as she did to recover from the Hephthalite disasters of 484. Khosrow's system of promoting honest government officials and professional military men to the administration of state taxes did much to increase the army's discipline and efficiency.

Khosrow ordered the repair and expansion of the road system throughout the Empire. The military objective was to allow for the rapid transfer of the army to the critical border zones of the Empire, from Central Asia to Mesopotamia-Anatolia, and vice versa. The principle of relying on extensive and efficient road systems had been pioneered in Achaemenid times, and was also very efficiently utilized by the Romans. Khosrow's reforms were also intended to provide a north–south axis, which defended the Persian Gulf-Khuzistan regions in the south and the Caucasian passes in the north.

The road system was part of a reformed communications system. Critical news pertaining to invasions and enemy troop deployments was now relayed more rapidly due to Khosrow's reforms of the postal and message-relay systems. This was essentially a chain of stations along the entire road system, the origins of which harked back to the Achaemenids of old. As in Achaemenid times, these stations provided rest quarters for rapid-moving couriers, and shelter for other travelers. What was different from the Achaemenid system was the commissioning of military personnel to stand guard at select stations, to ensure that communications were maintained in times of military crises. Khosrow's military reforms to the road and communications systems also ensured the safe travel of scholars, artists, and entrepreneurs throughout the Empire, allowing a vigorous exchange of culture, arts, architecture, and learning between Persia, India, and Byzantium.

By the time of Khosrow I and possibly under Kavad, the super-heavy knights had been discontinued. In their place arrived the "composite" cavalryman, whose role was to combine the functions of the horse archers and the regular lance-bearing knights. From perhaps as early as the 330s until the Hephthalite disasters of 484, the Sassanian army appears to have relied on separate units of horse archers and super-heavy lance-bearing knights. The Sassanians did not strictly limit archery to the horse archers as the Parthians had done – early Sassanian knights can be seen with quivers at the Naghsh-e-Rustam reliefs. By the time of Shapur II, horse archery was provided by armored horse archers, who may have also carried close-quarter combat weapons, most likely swords and daggers. Another possibility is that these were simply the Savaran of the early type, who were now supporting the heavy knights specializing in breakthrough operations with lances or pikes. Defeats in the Central Asian frontier may have been a major impetus in adopting a more versatile "composite" knight, equally adept at lance fighting and horse archery. Like the earlier super-heavy knights, the composite cavalryman was protected, wearing a helmet most likely of Spangenhelm type, and mail armor, and carrying a small shield. They carried a lance like the super-heavy Savaran, but also a bowcase with two bows in it, and spare bowstrings behind their helmet.[5] These warriors would have employed the Turko-Hun stirrup and two-point suspension system, improving their versatility. Perhaps the Sassanian army had concluded that "overspecialized" super-heavy knights were too vulnerable to the highly mobile and diffuse horse archers, especially with the advent of the stirrup and the newer Avar-Hun bows. The composite Savaran knights were trained to be more "fluid" on the battlefield. The Savaran could now engage their Byzantine cataphract counterparts, or the nimble Hun-Turkic horse archers of Central Asia.

The Dailamites, who hailed from the forests of northern Persia, were among the most prestigious non-cavalry units by the late Sassanian era. They were equipped and decorated



Sassanian banners. From left, banner with a wild boar on it, banner with dragon on it, four-tongued banner. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)

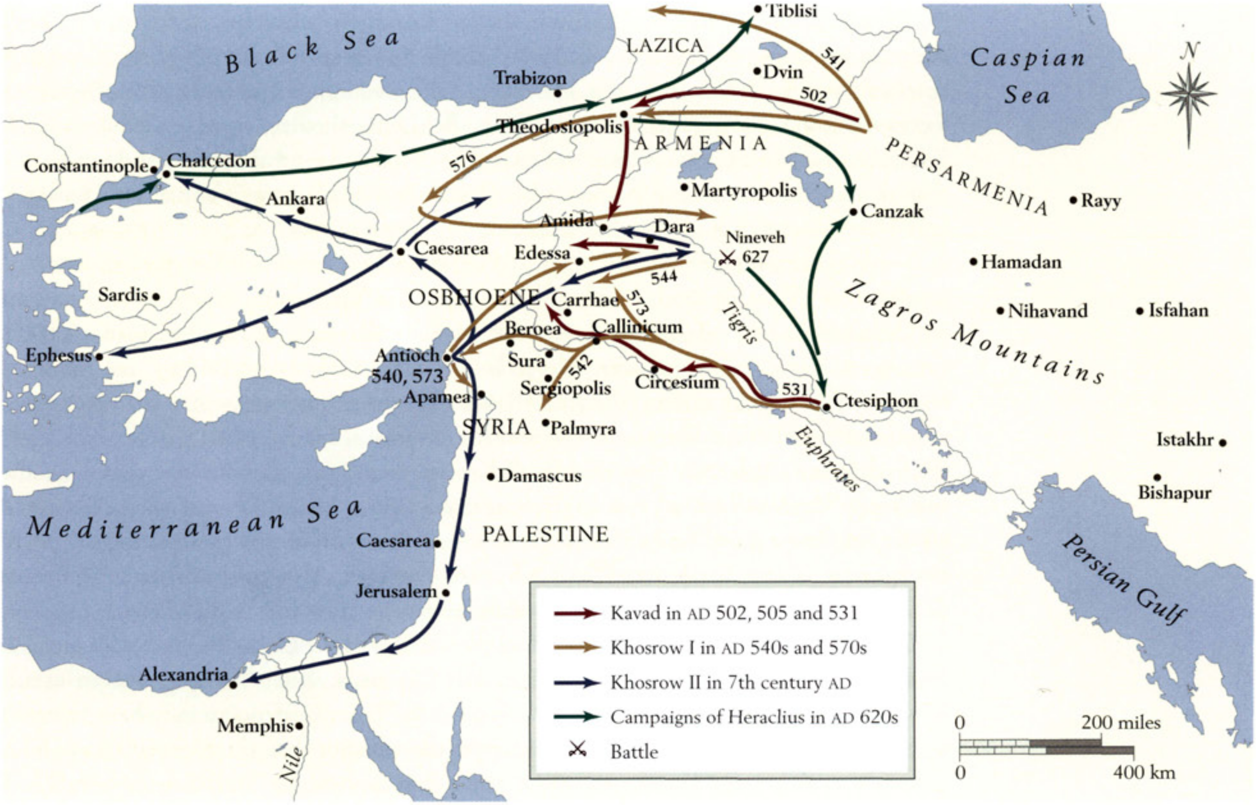
much like the Savaran, and are the only infantry force positively praised by Greco-Roman sources.[6] They fought at close quarters with swords, battle-axes, slings, archery, daggers, and two-pronged javelins against the Byzantines, especially in the Caucasus.[7] They are often described carrying brightly painted shields.[8] Later Arab warriors highly praised the Dailamites' martial qualities and actively sought to recruit them into their armies.

Khosrow's wars with Rome

Khosrow and Emperor Justinian agreed to settle the disputes of their respective empires by negotiation. These resulted in the *Pax Perpetuum* (lit. eternal peace) in 535 or 537, which supposedly settled all Sassanian-Byzantine territorial disputes. The Byzantines provided funds to the Sassanians to help subsidize the costs of maintaining the fortifications along the Caucasian passes, which were crucial in preventing warrior tribes from invading Byzantine soil in Anatolia.[9] Justinian may have also hoped that such payments would help dissuade possible future Sassanian adventures against Byzantium. In return, the Sassanians agreed to leave Dara under Byzantine jurisdiction, with the proviso that no additional construction would be made to strengthen the city's defenses. However, Justinian did not accede to Khosrow's demand to surrender Lazica in the Caucasus. The treaty allowed for Justinian to redeploy much of his military to the west, which by now had been largely overrun by the Goths and their allies. Khosrow in turn used the peace to consolidate his own political position within the Empire.

Relations remained cordial until 540. Iranian historians explain the renewed war as being due to hostile Roman intervention in Mesopotamia and the Caucasus. At Hira, the Byzantines were engaged in inciting rebellions against the Lakhmid Arab allies of the Sassanians.[10] Byzantine interference in the Caucasus, notably Armenia and Georgia, was also viewed with alarm by the Sassanians. Khosrow I had received embassies from the European enemies of the Byzantines, notably the Goths. Evidently, the Goths were hoping for a Sassanian offensive against Justinian which would relieve the military pressure that had been applied against them by Byzantine armies. Khosrow may have also feared that Justinian would attack the Sassanian Empire after he had finished off the Goths and their allies in Europe.

Roman and Sassanian campaigns 6th century AD


Black Sea
Caspian Sea
N
LAZICA
Tiblisi
Dvin
Trabizon
Theodosiopolis
ARMENIA
PERSARMENIA
541
502
576
Constantinople
Chalcedon
Ankara
Martyropolis
Canzak
Rayy
Amida
Dara
Caesarea
Edessa
Nineveh
627
Hamadan
Sardis
OSBHOENE
Carrhae
544
573
Zagros Mountains
Nihavand
Isfahan
Beroea
Callinicum
Tigris
Ephesus
Antioch
540, 573
Sura
542
Apamea
Sergiopolis
Circesium
531
Ctesiphon
SYRIA
Palmyra
Euphrates
Istakhr
Damascus
Bishapur
Mediterranean Sea
Caesarea
PALESTINE
Persian Gulf
Jerusalem
Kavad in AD 502, 505 and 531
Khosrow I in AD 540s and 570s
Khosrow II in 7th century AD
Campaigns of Heraclius in AD 620s
Battle
Alexandria
0
200 miles
Memphis
0
400 km
Nile

The Sassanian high command was apparently convinced that the Byzantines would soon resort to military action against them. Khosrow I decided to launch a preemptive strike as soon as possible; the army was mobilized for war. The Byzantine armies were led by Bouzes, instead of the brilliant Belisarius who was now engaged in the west. In May 540, the Savaran led a rapid strike into Syria by crossing the Euphrates. The Byzantines were unable to prevent Khosrow's advance. The Savaran, however, failed to capture Zenobia, leading them towards Sura, which they captured.[11] Antioch was now besieged by the Savaran. The Byzantines had failed to rebuild the city's defenses after an earthquake 15 years previously, indicative of their distractions in Italy and North Africa. Antioch fell by June 540.[12] The entire population was deported and settled close to Ctesiphon, where Khosrow commissioned the building of a city modeled on the original plans of Antioch. The city was officially named as Veh Antioch Khosrow (lit. better than Antioch had Khosrow built this). The Romans called it Rumagan (town of the Greeks/Romans); the later Arabs referred to it as Al-Rumiyya. With the fall of Antioch, the Byzantine position in Syria-Mesopotamia unraveled. Khosrow seemed unstoppable: Sassanian armies reached the Mediterranean Sea. Apamea was also successfully attacked, but Khosrow wisely chose not to confiscate the fragments of the True Cross.[13] Next was the city of Chalcis, which chose to pay off Khosrow rather than resist. The Sassanian army now struck towards Carrhae, and then into Constantia. Dara was also attacked, and nearly captured by a mining operation. This action, however, was decisively defeated by Byzantine countermining measures.[14]

Just as Khosrow departed to campaign in the Caucasus, Belisarius took command of the Byzantine eastern theater. He found the local troops in a decrepit state: many without weapons or armor.[15] Belisarius, however, decided to take full advantage of Khosrow's absence from Syria-Mesopotamia. He successfully reequipped and reorganized Byzantine forces in the region. Assembling at Dara, Belisarius thrust towards Nisibis in 541. Belisarius' vanguards approaching the city were defeated by what appears to have been a cavalry raid led by General Nabed. This Sassanian success proved ephemeral, however, and Nabed was defeated after the arrival of Belisarius' main force.[16]

Nisibis' defenses proved too tough to subdue. This led Belisarius to focus on the smaller fort of Sisauranon, which he soon captured. The captives of the city were sent to Constantinople.[17] Belisarius could not exploit this success, mainly because of the exhausted state of his military. Nevertheless, his excellent generalship did much to contain Khosrow's earlier thrusts. Realizing the seriousness of the Byzantine counteroffensive, Khosrow returned from the Caucasus. He launched a new offensive in 542, this time towards Cappadocia. Belisarius was again dispatched to restore the situation. Khosrow's intent was to use Cappadocia as a launching area against Palestine to the southwest.[18] Belisarius dissuaded Khosrow from this thrust by situating his forces to the west of the Euphrates River. Khosrow may have also overestimated the size of Belisarius' forces, which may explain why he simply retreated back into Persia.[19]

During his retreat, Khosrow may have placed a portion of his forces under General Mehr-Mehroe, who had campaigned in the Caucasus. Mehr-Mehroe was to attack Byzantine positions along the northern Euphrates River. Callinicum may have fallen to his forces in 542.[20] Khosrow soon struck again by a major thrust against Edessa in 543. Losses were heavy, but Khosrow was determined to capture the city. Khosrow's engineers built a large mound in an attempt to tower over the city's walls, but the defenders proved obstinate, setting fire to the mound.[21] Negotiation and payments by the leaders of Edessa persuaded Khosrow to abandon the siege of the city.

The Lazic War

The Sassanians were also involved in a major showdown in the Caucasus. After the construction of Veh Antioch Khosrow, Khosrow built a number of towns and major walls to bolster the defenses of the Caucasian passes. At Ctesiphon, Khosrow had received emissaries from Lazica asking for help in countering Byzantine incursions into the region. The northern Caucasus, especially above Armenia, had become yet another arena of Roman-Sassanian rivalry.

Lazica's strategic importance was its ability to provide potential naval bases along the west Caucasian coast. A newly built naval force could project Sassanian power into the Black Sea for the first time, posing a direct challenge to Byzantine maritime supremacy there. Lazica was also a vital region which connected the trade routes from Iran into the Caucasus and beyond, into Eastern Europe. At the very least, Sassanian control of regions such as Petra in Lazica would greatly enhance the Empire's revenues. The Byzantine political and military leadership were determined to prevent the loss of Lazica to Khosrow.

Khosrow struck into Lazica in 541. Thanks to the excesses of Byzantine officials in the region, the King of Lazica declared his allegiance and that of his kingdom to

Khosrow.[22] This allowed for the establishment of an Iranian protectorate over Lazica for the first time in the history of the Sassanians. To secure Lazica, however, the Sassanians had to capture the rock-fortress of Petra, which housed an important Byzantine contingent. The Sassanians under General Mehr-Mehroe surrounded the city with a large ditch, and the city soon surrendered. The Byzantine defenders defected to Mehr-Mehroe and joined his army.[23] In the meantime, the Byzantines had evacuated and destroyed their bases in Pityus and Sebastopolis.[24] Belisarius' success at Sisauranon, combined with attacks by pro-Byzantine Arabs against Assyria (modern-day Iraqi Kurdistan), compelled Khosrow and the main Sassanian forces in the Caucasus to move into Mesopotamia. This left only the Sassanian garrison at Petra to defend Lazica.[25]

At the height of military operations in 542, Khosrow and Justinian attempted to reach a truce. To that end, Khosrow awaited the arrival of a Byzantine delegation in Atropatene. Instead of a delegation, the Sassanians witnessed a full-scale Byzantine attack, to the north of Atropatene, in Armenia. Justinian's change in attitude was apparently due to false rumors that Khosrow's rule was unstable. The Byzantine force of 30,000 warriors vastly outnumbered the 4,000 troops of general Nabed in the Caucasus.[26] Realizing the hopelessness of a direct battle, Nabed retreated into the town of Anglon in Armenia. Nabed's troops were most likely a combination of Dailamite infantry and Savaran cavalry. The troops dispersed into carefully prepared positions to maximize the effects of their archery. When the Byzantines arrived in Anglon, they were ambushed.[27] The urban nature of this conflict may have also allowed the Sassanians to engage in "archery sniping." The Byzantines could not effectively counterattack because of the intensity of the archery barrages, and they were decisively crushed. The survivors fled towards the Armenian-Byzantine borders.[28] An armistice was finally reached in 545, but fighting in the Caucasus continued.

The success in Armenia was in stark contrast to the Sassanian position in Lazica. Relations with the Iberians had deteriorated. First, the Iberians were devout Christians, who stood at odds with the Aryan practices of the magi.[29] Second, the Sassanians had (inexplicably) denuded the Iberians of the prosperous Black Sea trade.[30] Anti-Sassanian rebellions broke out in Lazica by 547, prompting Justinian to dispatch 8,000 troops to support the Lazic King Gubazes. Gubazes and the Romans attempted to recruit the Turkic Sabir and Iranic Alan tribes of the region to fight against the Sassanians. Byzantine commander Dagisthaeus soon besieged Petra, defended by 1,500 Sassanian troops, presumably a combination of Dailamite infantry and Savaran cavalry. The Byzantine assaults resulted in the loss of 1,200 Sassanian troops, but the garrison held out. Just as a Byzantine victory seemed imminent at Petra, Mehr-Mehroe arrived with a relief force of 30,000 troops. Dagisthaeus rapidly broke off his siege and withdrew from Petra. Mehr-Mehroe reinforced the Petra garrison with 3,000 of his Savaran. Nevertheless, Mehr-Mehroe and his main force were unable to stay in Lazica for long. The ambushes of Dagisthaeus and his Lazic allies, combined with supply shortages, forced Mehr-Mehroe to withdraw back into Atropatene, in northwest Iran. The garrison at Petra was now on its own.[31]

Alarmed at the prospect of losing Petra, Khosrow dispatched General Khworian with a Savaran force into Lazica in 549. Dagisthaeus and his Lazic allies fought a number of inconclusive cavalry battles against Khworian's Savaran. The tide began to turn decisively against Khworian with the arrival of Byzantine and Lazic reinforcements. The Roman cavalry dismounted to form an infantry phalanx formation. These blocked all of the cavalry attacks of the Savaran. Khworian was himself killed, and his army completely defeated.[32] These actions, however, allowed a Sassanian column to bring badly needed supplies to the garrison at Petra.

The Byzantines engaged in a furious effort to capture the fortress in 551. General Bessas and some Sabir allies attacked the city, but were confronted with the determined defense of the Sassanian garrison who used petroleum and naphtha to repel the assailants. After a prolonged effort, two of Petra's walls crumbled, finally allowing the Byzantines to break into the fortress. The tenacity of the Sassanian defense is indicated by the large number of casualties. Of the 3,000 defenders, 700 were killed during the siege, 1,075 fell in the Byzantine breakthrough into the fortress, and a further 500 retreated into the citadel and fought to the last man. Only 725 men were captured and all but 18 of these were severely wounded.

Mehr-Mehroe returned to Lazica with a force of Savaran, Sabir Huns, battle elephants, and Dailamite infantry, but was defeated with heavy losses.[33] The Byzantines, however, failed to completely expel the Sassanians from Lazica. Mehr-Mehroe counterattacked in 554, and captured the fortress of Telephis, which was commanded by General Martin.[34] The latter attempted an attack against the Sassanian fortress of Ottogaris in 555, but was decisively defeated. Martin finally scored a major success in 556, when he defeated a Sassanian force led by a *nakhvaregan* (a form of field marshal) of 60,000 troops, which included a number of Dailamites. This was the last major battle in the Caucasus. The savagery of the battles in Lazica was an indication of the disastrous Sassano-Byzantine wars to come in the early 7th century AD.

Even as the Sassanians and Byzantines were fighting each other, attempts at peace negotiations had been in place as early as 551. These finally bore fruit in a formal 50-year peace treaty by 561. Khosrow agreed to evacuate the Savaran from Lazica, in return for an annual payment of gold by the Byzantines.[35] Both parties agreed to avoid inciting nomadic warrior peoples against the other. Meanwhile, Sassanian Persian cultural influence had begun its penetration from the northern Caucasus towards the Kuban, Crimea, and the Ukraine.[36]

Late Sassanian helmet, 6th–7th century AD. (Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, Inv. IR 1315)

Campaigns in Yemen

With the conclusion of the Lazic and Syria-Mesopotamian wars, the Empire was soon forced to turn its attention south to alarming developments in the Persian Gulf. The impetus of the conflict came from Abyssinia in northwest Africa, near Arabia. The Abyssinians, who had adopted Monophysite Christianity, had been encouraged by the Byzantines to cross the Red Sea into Arabia by 522. They soon clashed with the Himyarites of the southern Arabian Peninsula, but were defeated and expelled by 525. The Abyssinians requested assistance from the Byzantines, who responded by providing them with supplies and vessels.

The Abyssinians crossed the Red Sea once more, and this time, overcame the Himyarites and killed their king, Dhu Nuwas.

The Abyssinians soon gained supremacy in Arabia Felix (near modern Yemen), where they projected their authority into the interior of Arabia. Strategically, this posed two critical dangers for the Sassanians. First, the Abyssinians had the potential to contest Sassanian economic and political supremacy in the Persian Gulf. This region was a vital Sassanian sea outlet to India, Ceylon, the southern ports of Arabia, and other maritime trading centers in (or even beyond) the Indian Ocean. According to Procopius, Justinian dispatched an embassy to the Abyssinians in 531, requesting that they sever Persia's maritime links with India. The second concern was military. The unchecked growth of Abyssinian power would eventually allow them to launch attacks along the Empire's southeastern coastline. This would place the Sassanians in a potential two-front war, as the Abyssinians could coordinate their military actions in alliance with the Byzantines.

The Yemenite Arabs, led by Sayf Bin Ze'yazan, soon revolted against their Abyssinian occupiers. Following unsuccessful appeals to the Byzantines for assistance, Sayf Bin Ze'yazan sent emissaries to Khosrow to appeal for direct Sassanian military intervention against the Abyssinians. A contingent of 8,000 Sassanian warriors led by Vahriz, a Savaran commander, was organized to set sail for Yemen. Al-Tabari describes the force as being transported by an armada of eight ships. A number of these were then lost at sea with their crews, resulting in only 800 men landing around Aden. Vahriz is then reputed to have ordered the ships to be burnt, to eliminate any "second thoughts" in those warriors who might wish to escape back to Persia.

Vahriz's forces soon encountered and thoroughly defeated the Abyssinians. Sayf Bin Ze'yazan was placed in power in Sanaa, and became the King of Yemen (r. AD 575–577). He agreed to act as Khosrow's representative making him, in effect, a Sassanian marzban. The Abyssinians, however, counterattacked shortly thereafter and Sayf Bin Ze'yazan was killed. Vahriz struck back by 598, and this time totally crushed the Abyssinians. The defeat was thorough and complete: the Abyssinians vacated all of their territories in Arabia, and sailed back across the Red Sea to their homelands. Vahriz then supported the ascension of Sayf's son (Ma'adi Karab) to power in Sanaa. Yemen became a province of the Sassanian Empire, a status that remained in place until the arrival of the forces of Islam.

Not only had Justinian failed to sever Sassanian maritime links with India, he had inadvertently strengthened them. By attempting to influence the political machinations in Arabia to its own advantage, Byzantium had obliged Khosrow to intervene. The end result was a permanent Sassanian maritime presence in Yemen. This further strengthened the Sassanian-Indian trade links, already in existence across the Persian Gulf, as well as along the Empire's borders to the southeast.

It is interesting that Vahriz's warriors are described as convicts who had been condemned to death by the Sassanians. Motofi[37] has speculated that these were members of the Mazdakite movement, an attribution that is not altogether unlikely. After the second campaign, many of Vahriz's men settled in Yemen, and married the local Yemenite women. The descendants of these unions were known as the "Abna,"[38] and later negotiated with the prophet Mohammed and joined the cause of Islam.[39]

Defeat of the Hephthalites

With peace secured along the Empire's western and southern frontiers, Khosrow and the high command were finally able to focus attention on the dreaded Hephthalites. These had again caused much havoc and hardship for the inhabitants of the northeastern regions of the Sassanian Empire. Despite the good performance of the army against the Byzantines and in Yemen, the Sassanian high command appeared reluctant to take on the Hephthalite military machine single-handedly. Khosrow's military reforms, though significant, would not be fully realized until the late 500s, and the Hephthalites remained formidable foes. Although Kavad had been able to contain them, he certainly had not conquered them. Although Byzantine and Abyssinian warriors were formidable, the Hephthalite Huns were far more deadly, cunning, and dangerous from the Sassanian military viewpoint. Khosrow soon sought the military assistance of the Turkish Goks (lit. celestial/blue) who had recently arrived to the northeast of the Hephthalites.[40]

The recent arrival of the Turks is verified by the first mention of the name "Gok Turk" in the year AD 552 by Chinese sources.[41] This is perhaps the first actual reference to the word "Turk." The term may also be a derivation from *tueh-chi*, an ancient Chinese word for helmet, although this has not been definitively established. The Turks were one of the last peoples to have descended from the Hsiang-Nou confederation. The formidable Hsiang-Nou Empire had spanned from Chosen (Korea) in the Far East to the Altai Mountains to the west, bordering Central Asia. To their south, the Hsiang-Nou shared a massive border running from the Transbaikalia to the mighty Chinese civilization. It was the descendants of the Hsiang-Nou, the Huns, Chionites, Turks, and possibly the Hephthalites, who confronted the Iranians to their west in Central Asia, and from there began to raid into Sassanian Persia, India, the Caucasus, and Europe. The Turks became neighbors of the Hephthalites, but the relations between the two races proved far from cordial. The Turks became the mortal enemies of the Hephthalites, and soon looked for allies to fight against them.

The Sassanian high command and the Turks concluded a military alliance. The Hephthalites were now threatened on two fronts, by the Turks to their northeast and the Sassanians to their south. The Hephthalites were also divided in their leadership, which compromised their ability to resist. The Savaran had by now become an entirely new force, having incorporated the harsh lessons of their previous defeats at Hephthalite hands.[42] Khosrow's main problem, however, would have been manpower. To bolster his Hephthalite campaign, Khosrow was obliged to dangerously thin out his forces along the Empire's western frontiers.

The Savaran, with the Turks, struck into the Hephthalite kingdom in 557–558. The Hephthalites may have lacked the Sassanian organizational and military capacity to fight along several fronts simultaneously. Hephthalite guile and daring could no longer ensnare the Savaran, and proved to be of no avail against the Turks. The Hephthalites were duly crushed and their king slain. The Sassanians annexed much Hephthalite territory south of the Oxus River, while the Turks extended their frontiers to the north of the river. The Sassanians appear to have been in full control of Bactria by 560. The Sassanian-Turkish alliance effectively destroyed the Hephthalites and terminated their ascendancy in northeastern Persia and Central Asia. Khosrow had restored Sassanian honor in the east and avenged the death of his grandfather Peroz. The remnants of the Hephthalites in Sassanian territory accepted the full authority of the Sassanians, while those in Turkish territory became vassals of the Turks.

Turkish-Sassanian relations were initially respectful and apparently constructive. Khosrow's Turkish allies are described by Masoudi as having provided him with gifts such as "100 Tibetan shields."[43] Unfortunately, cordiality soon gave way to suspicion, and then to animosity. The issue was economic supremacy. Khosrow's past wars in Yemen and Lazica had been partly fought for economic considerations and he had every intention of fully dominating the Silk Route trade traversing Central Asia.

Khosrow had already transformed Persia into an academic, artistic, and architectural powerhouse. This cultural revival could only be sustained by a stable, vigorous, and powerful economy. Khosrow's ambitions clashed with those of the Gok Turks, who also endeavored to gain a greater share of the Silk Route trade. The Turks and the Sassanians were now steadily moving towards confrontation. By 568, emissaries from the Gok kingdom reached Constantinople to propose an alliance between Byzantium and the Turks. The main thrust of the proposal was to launch a simultaneous attack on the Sassanian Empire, forcing it to fight a two-front war. Fortunately for the Sassanians, this project never materialized. Nevertheless, the idea of a Byzantine-Turk alliance had crystallized in Constantinople, and would be fully exploited by Emperor Heraclius.

Justin II fails against Khosrow

The Emperor Justin II succeeded the throne in 565, after the death of Justinian. Justin II's first action in the east was to cease his annual tribute to those Arab tribes who regularly launched raids in search of plunder in Byzantine Syria. While the Arabs could be contained with military power, the handling of the Sassanian Empire required a mixture of delicate diplomacy and effective military action. Justin II proved especially inept at both.[44]

With the elimination of the Hephthalite threat in Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf and Yemen secure, Khosrow felt confident in shifting his attention once more towards the west. This was soon reflected in the building of a fire temple near Yerevan in 564 by the Sassanian governor of Armenia, who was a member of the Suren-Pahlav family. While this certainly aroused the ire of the Christian Armenians, the killing of a member of the Mamikonian family resulted in a violent rebellion. The violence soon proved impossible to control and claimed the lives of the governor and his family by 571. The governor's guard units had also been killed, resulting in a temporary power vacuum in Armenia. Justin II had watched these developments closely in Constantinople and decided to take advantage of the chaos in the Caucasus.

Justin's first action was to cease the annual contribution of funds for the maintenance of defenses along the Caucasian passes. From the Sassanian perspective, Justin's decision was virtually an act of war. By 572, Justin dispatched a powerful army into Sassanian territory, and Nisibis was put to siege. The city's defenses held out successfully, and the Byzantine field generals soon began to disagree amongst themselves. A raiding party of the Savaran also inflicted casualties on the besieging Byzantine infantry.[45] The Byzantine forces soon retreated, and practically handed the military initiative to Khosrow.

The Savaran now laid the fortress-city of Dara (modern Diyarbakr) to siege. This campaign was led by the aged Khosrow in person. Dara was perhaps one of the most significant lynchpins of the Byzantine defense on the Sassanian frontiers. Khosrow assembled 23,000 Savaran cavalry, 40,000 infantry, and 120,000 farm laborers to assist in siege work. The turning point occurred when the Sassanians built large mounds and made effective use of their ballistae and battering rams. Dara finally fell after five months, allowing the Savaran to launch powerful raids into Syria, severely endangering the Byzantine position in that region.

The unfavorable military situation now compelled Justin II to appeal for peace. The Byzantines were in no mood for another costly and prolonged confrontation with the Savaran. Justin II agreed to pay the Sassanians a total of 40,000 gold aurei. Khosrow accepted and returned peacefully to the frontier. Dara, however, remained in Sassanian hands. The loss of Dara seems to have had a profoundly negative psychological impact upon Justin II, who lost his sanity soon after.

Tiberius succeeded Justin II in 578, and a truce with Khosrow appeared imminent. The Sassanians, however, sensing that they held the upper hand, decided to place further pressure on the Byzantines. The Savaran successfully thrust into Roman positions in Armenia. Just as total victory seemed all but assured, the Byzantines made a number of successful counterattacks and defeated the Savaran. Truce negotiations were underway in 578, but interrupted when the Sassanians crushed a Byzantine force. The initiative had been regained by the Sassanians; however, this was to prove ephemeral.

In 578, Maurice again led the Byzantine forces on a number of successful counterattacks. Meanwhile, the Armenian revolt was ended with a general amnesty. Crucial was Khosrow's acknowledgement of Armenia's Christian heritage. This allowed

The archway of Khosrow at Ctesiphon is estimated to date between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD. Built of fired bricks and standing 93ft (28.4m) high and 84ft (25.5m) wide, the archway is the largest single-span vault of unreinforced brick in the world. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge) the Sassanians to stabilize their authority in Armenia. A year later in 579, Maurice engaged in peace negotiations with the Sassanians, the same year in which the aged Khosrow passed away.

The legacy of Khosrow

Promotion of the Silk Route

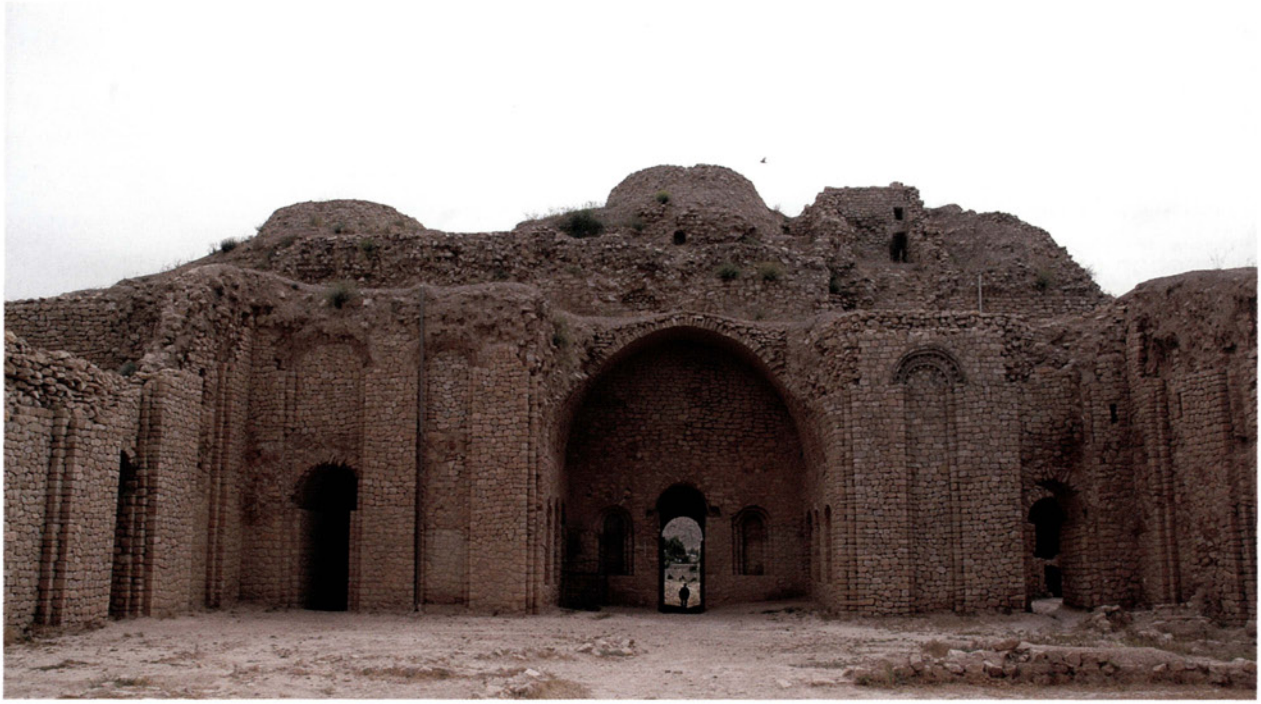
During the reign of Khosrow, Sassanian Persia became a major economic artery in the passage of Chinese silk and goods to Byzantium and Egypt. Once these were in Byzantine territory, Chinese goods, especially silk, would be transferred to Europe through Roman-ruled Syria. Although the networks of the trade had been in existence for many years, Khosrow played a crucial role in the promotion of the Silk Route. The Sassanians and the Tang Chinese formalized and rationalized their Silk Route trade through a number of treaties, which resulted in at least ten diplomatic exchanges taking place between the years 445 and 521. The most famous of these arrangements was, of course, in silk, which the Chinese exported to Persia. Textile craftsmen in Persia would in turn export the manufactured fabrics back to China, where they gained high popularity especially among the gentry. The Silk Route, however, traded in a wide variety of other goods including aromas, spices, herbs, tools, weapons, and artistic products. The Sassanians also worked to formalize the passage of the Silk Route from their territory into that of Rome. This resulted in the signing of economic treaties with the Byzantines in 297, 408, and finally in 562 by Khosrow I.

A Second Renaissance

Khosrow passed away in his palace at Ctesiphon after a reign of 48 years, ending perhaps the most glorious era of Sassanian rule. During his rule ancient Iran, or Persia, experienced a "second renaissance" in learning, music, arts, architecture, and trade.

Khosrow was an avid patron of learning and philosophy. During his reign, a university was built in the town of Gund-i-Shapur (Jundishapur, lit. the army camp of Shapur). Khosrow had a personal interest in Greek philosophy. He eagerly granted asylum to Greek scholars, after the edict of Emperor Justinian closed down the school of Athens in 529.[46] A great deal of care was made towards promoting and preserving the works of Classical Greece, particularly those of Plato and Aristotle.[47] There was also a particular interest in Indian sciences, philosophy, and medicine. Khosrow sent numerous embassies and generous gifts to India, requesting the dispatch of Indian scholars and texts to Persia. The Indians reciprocated by sending texts, such as the *Kalila-Damla*, which was translated to Pahlavi.

Syriac or Assyrian scholars, whose claim to scholarship predated that of Greece and Persia, were also highly valued. The learning traditions of Greece, Persia, India, and the Arameans were now undergoing a profound synthesis, just as Persepolis had fused the disparate styles of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt into a single artistic and architectural unity. One outcome of this Sassanian synthesis was the invention of the *bimaristan*, the first hospital to introduce the concept of segregating wards according to pathology.[48] Greek pharmacology now fused with the traditions of the Iranian plateau and India, resulting in significant advances in medicine. While Jundishapur was a leading center of learning, similar sites existed in places such as Tabriz and Shiz in Atropatene, Merv in Central Asia,



The architectural plans for the Basilica of Maxentius (opposite), which was begun in Rome in AD 306, appear to be almost entirely based on the model of Ardashir I's palace at Firuzabad (above). (above: © Livius.org; opposite: Hervé Champollion/akg-images)

Ctesiphon, and of course, Babylon. Khosrow's promotion of learning and medicine was to be passed onto the later Islamic caliphate, who subsequently introduced much of that knowledge (including the "lost" Greek works) to western Europe.[49]

The Mediterranean had long enjoyed a profound intercourse with Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau through Anatolia, resulting in the permeation of many architectural traditions from Achaemenid Persia to the West. This was strengthened during the Sassanian era, both as a result of the Silk Route and the cultural exchanges that took place between the Byzantines and Sassanian Persia. Sassanian architecture was to exert a powerful influence upon the Romans, a process that began in the early Sassanian era. Direct parallels have been discovered between the Firuzabad palace of Ardashir (built AD 224–226) and the Basilica of Maxentius in Rome (started AD 306). Khosrow's reign witnessed an apex in Sassanian architecture, one that would be maintained to the last days of the dynasty. One of the enduring legacies of Khosrow's patronage of the arts and architecture is the famous palace of Ctesiphon, of which only a portion of the central arch stands today. Considered one of the architectural wonders of antiquity, the dimensions of this arch have never been replicated.[50] The large size of this archway was meant to accommodate the plethora of religious and popular festivals prevalent in the Sassanian Empire. Military ceremonies such as the procession of elite guard units, funeral rites for fallen heroes, and medallion ceremonies appear to have passed under the "Tagh-e-Kasra" (lit. the roof of Khosrow). Ctesiphon also shares an Iranian legacy in western Europe. The archway of Ctesiphon closely resembles the construction and architectural style of the Church of Saint-Pierre in Vienna (built 5th century AD).[51] There was also a Sassanian influence in military architecture. After decades-long archeological studies of European-Roman and Iranian sites, Ghirshman concluded that: "the design of

[Partho-Sassanian] cities involved the robust circular design which was very efficient at defending against flank attacks … western military engineers were to draw upon this concept in the Middle Ages."[52]

By the time of Khosrow, a virtual explosion of silverware and metalworks had appeared in the Sassanian Empire. As noted by Ghirshman, these were "plates, bowls, round or boat-shaped drinking vessels with plain or festooned rims, jugs and ewers … unknown to Greece and Rome, this technique was exclusively Iranian."[53] A powerful motif was that of the seated king on the throne, with both hands clasping the hilt of his broadsword, and his feet pointed outwards. This theme is exemplified by the Cup of Khosrow, known in Europe as "The Cup of Solomon," allegedly given by the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid to Charlemagne. Similar motifs were to appear centuries later in European arts. The extent of Sassanian artistic and architectural influences on world civilization during its time and after its fall, are far beyond the scope of this text, however, the few examples here serve to illustrate the broad spread of these influences.

Chapter 17

The final glory and the decline of the Empire

Bahram Chobin and Khosrow II

Khosrow I was succeeded by his son, Hormuz IV (r. AD 579–590). Hormuz's mother was a Turkish princess, earning him the nickname "Tork-Zad" (lit. born of Turks).[1] Hormuz was an open-minded and tolerant monarch, and blocked the magi from persecuting Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and other religious minorities. He also took stern measures, including executions, against corrupt officials.[2] Hormuz, like his father, showed great concern for the welfare of the people, which unsurprisingly made him unpopular with members of the magi and the upper nobility. Hormuz's first serious challenge, however, came from the Byzantine west.

In 579, Emperor Tiberius made peace overtures to Hormuz, who rejected these outright. This resulted in a new round of fighting in Mesopotamia and Syria by 580. Many cities changed hands, but General Maurice managed to halt and contain the Savaran from overrunning the Caucasus, Anatolia, and Syria.[3] Two years later, Maurice became emperor (r. AD 582–602) and the fighting with Sassanian Persia continued until 589–590.

The Turanian wars and General Bahram Chobin

The Empire was now faced with a mortal threat in the northeast. The Turks, who now dominated Central Asia, were poised to invade, and would prove to be the most formidable foes faced by the Sassanians in Central Asia. The Turks were excellent warriors, and the heirs of a centuries-long Central Asian martial tradition. The proximity of Turkic peoples to China allowed for their adoption of Chinese technology, a process that was to endure well into the Islamic era. The Turks not only replaced the Hephthalites in Central Asia, but also became the final peoples to establish themselves in the region. The Sassanians put considerable military resources into the construction of defenses along the Central Asian borders. The army was also aware of the need to rapidly transfer the Savaran east to support the local *marzban* (lit. frontier guardian[4]) in the event of a Turkish invasion.

The Gok western Turkish kingdom was steadily rising in military power and political influence. The once-mighty Hephthalites now served as vassals in the armies of the Turks. By 588, a very large Turko-Hephthalite force invaded northeastern Persia,

Carving at Tagh-e-Bostan showing a boar hunt. Khosrow II is on horseback, shaded by an umbrella, accompanied by the Savaran, noblewomen, servants, musicians and elephants. (akg-images/Erich Lessing)

overrunning the Gorgan wall. Estimates of the force range from 100,000 to 300,000 in Chinese sources,[5] and even 400,000 according to some Iranian estimates.[6] While the fielding of 300–400,000 Turko-Hephthalite troops is most likely exaggerated, there is no question that the Savaran were heavily outnumbered.

An emergency *meezgerd* (round table) was convened at Ctesiphon to assess the threat. The military council agreed to post Bahram Chobin, a Savaran commander from the Mehran Clan of Rayy (near modern Tehran), to lead a small counterattacking force. Bahram had been the Marzban of Azerbaijan when the Turko-Hephthalites invaded in 588. Early in his career, Bahram had commanded a contingent of elite Savaran units. He had then distinguished himself commanding elite units during Khosrow Anushirawan's wars against the Byzantines. His battlefield exploits, especially at Dara,[7] had earned him the right to sit at the meezgerd as a member of the King's own "Darigbedum of the Royal Hearth."[8]

As soon as he was elected as battle leader, Bahram and the high command "hand picked" a force of 12,000 men,[9] all of whom were reputedly 40 years of age.[10] Bahram's support troops included infantry, most likely Dailamites, and battle elephants. Bahram and other distinguished commanders, such as Narde-Gushnasp and Izad-Gushnasp, gave the troops specific orders to avoid harassing the Turkic civilian population once the Sassanian army had broken into the Turkish Khagan's territory.

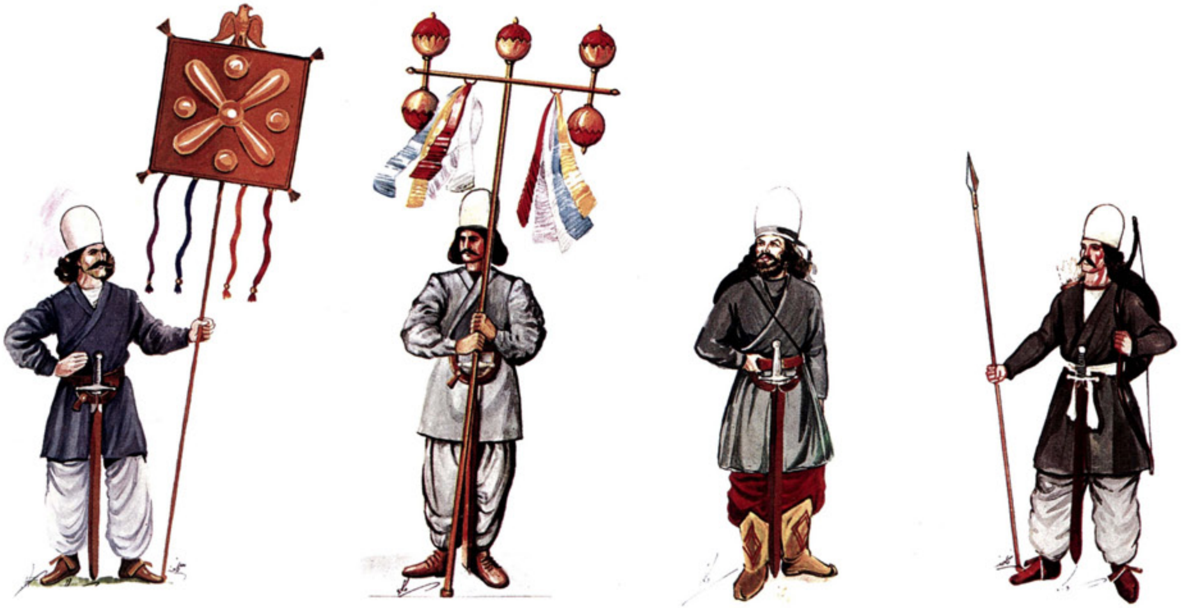
Careful to avoid the rashness of King Peroz nearly a century before, Bahram made every effort to obtain detailed military intelligence before launching the counterattack. A spy posing as a peace missionary was sent to the west Turkish Khagan. After compiling detailed information on the military composition and equipment of the Turko-Hephthalite forces, the spy fled the Khagan's camp at night. Bahram Chobin's forces were now fully informed of the Khagan's military dispositions, deployment, and strengths.

The small Sassanian force set out from Nev-Shapur to confront the Turko-Hephthalite armies in Khorassan. Bahram's positioning of his forces for battle was somewhat unorthodox, according to Sassanian battle tactics. Bahram had the Savaran occupying the central position, with the battle elephants placed on the right and left wings. The Dailamites were situated to the front of the Savaran.[11] This indicates that the Sassanian high command viewed the Dailamites as a professional infantry force, capable of facing dangerous foes such as the Byzantines or the Turko-Hephthalites.

Key to Bahram's strike in April 588 was a "commando" raid which was to penetrate straight into the heart of the Turko-Hephthalite positions. Motofi notes that "Bahram selected one hundred Pahlavan warriors of the Savaran and led them towards a hill where the Turkish king, who was seated on a golden throne, was observing the battle…"[12]

The infantry standing to the front must have opened their ranks to allow the Savaran to pass through. As the Savaran struck into the Turko-Hephthalites, Bahram and the Pahlavan knights headed straight towards the Khagan. The Turks proved unable to stop them. Bahram and the Pahlavan knights soon reached the Khagan's position. They then engaged the Khagan's bodyguards and destroyed them. Meanwhile, the armored battle elephants had simultaneously struck from the left and right flanks. By forcing themselves into the Turko-Hephthalite left and right flanks, the elephant archers could concentrate a deadly network of missiles into the enemy's interior and center. In such a scenario, the elephants may have indeed struck first, followed by the Savaran, with Bahram's strike force peeling off towards the Khagan. Meanwhile, the Dailamite heavy infantry would have followed behind the Savaran and "mopped up" the surviving (probably disorganized)

From left, Sassanian standard-bearer with Kaveh banner, banner with five balls, infantry officer, infantryman. (From *The 2,500 Year Celebrations for the Founding of the Persian Empire*)



Turko-Hephthalites. The immediate consequence of the defeat was the expulsion of the Turko-Hephthalites from Balkh.

It is clear that the Khagan was killed during Bahram Chobin's operations in the Central Asian theater in 588.[13] However, Chinese, Arabian, and Persian historical sources vary in their identification of the slain Turkish Khagan.[14] The Khagan's son, Yil-Tegin, escaped with a number of survivors to the castle of Avaze.[15] Bahram's small army besieged the city and forced Yil-Tegin to surrender. The city of Herat was also cleared of the Turko-Hephthalites by 589. Having completed the conquest of the western Turks, Bahram now crossed the Oxus River and defeated the eastern Turks. The eastern Turkish Khagan was also killed during these operations.[16] It would appear that the Savaran had by now far surpassed the Turks and Hephthalites in tactics and combat performance. The Sassanian Empire was now the master of Central Asia, with China gaining ascendancy to the east of the region.

The Savaran captured much booty from these campaigns. Bahram retained the lion's share of the total haul for himself and his troops. A haul of 300 camels was sent to Hormuz in Ctesiphon. The fact that Bahram kept much of the haul to himself may have contributed to Hormuz's subsequent hostility against the general. Bahram Chobin and the Savaran had fully averted the humiliation that had been suffered by King Peroz over a century before. The exploits of Bahram Chobin were greeted with rapturous celebrations all across the Empire, and are recalled in the *Shahname* epic. Hormuz viewed the growing popularity of Bahram with increasing alarm and soon looked for ways to undermine the general.

Bahram Chobin seizes power

Bahram was sent by Hormuz to do battle against the Byzantines in the Caucasus, but he could not repeat his overwhelming successes in the East, and was defeated.[17] The defeat in the Caucasus provided Hormuz with the excuse he needed to discredit the general.[18] In a move clearly designed to question Bahram's martial prowess, Hormuz sent him a woman's dress. Hormuz's gesture backfired, as Bahram's troops not only rallied around their general, but declared him as King.[19] Bahram signed a treaty with the Turks and a number of Turkish warriors joined Bahram's banner. Bahram also had the support of his powerful clan, the Mehran – one of the major Parthian families that formed the backbone of the Sassanian Empire. Some members of the nobility viewed Bahram as a legitimate monarch, one who could even restore the throne of the Parthians.[20]

Bahram, his Savaran, and Turkish volunteers now marched southwards towards Ctesiphon. Hormuz dispatched an army against Bahram, most likely the elite Savaran of the Royal Guards. The Savaran of Nisibis, however, refused to fight their comrades in Bahram's army, and joined Bahram. Nevertheless, the Ctesiphon Savaran rejected Bahram's bid for kingship, as he was not a direct descendant of the House of Sassan. They declared their support for Khosrow II (r. AD 591–628), the son of Hormuz IV. The population of the Empire was sympathetic to Bahram and some may have even joined his cause.[21] These events were leading to a dangerous state of disorder within the Empire, one that was to reappear on the eve of the Arabian invasions in the 630s.

Unlike his earlier days, Hormuz's kingship was now proving to be increasingly unpopular among the Empire's populace. Hormuz's conduct had also alienated much of the nobility, having, according to al-Tabari, killed 13,000 members of them and the military aristocracy.

Hormuz seemed incapable of quick and decisive action in times of crisis, a factor which, if left unchecked, would inevitably invite Byzantine adventures. The nobility soon conspired to remove Hormuz from the throne. With the support of Khosrow's maternal uncles Bindoe and Bastam, Hormuz was imprisoned, blinded, and then killed. There is considerable debate as to who actually ordered the murder of Hormuz. Opinion is divided between those who accuse Khosrow of patricide, and those who accuse his uncles of the murder. The latter scenario posits that the murder took place without the approval or knowledge of Khosrow.

One of the consequences of Hormuz's overthrow was the increased political role that began to be exercised by the generals. Although the house of Sassan was to soon reestablish itself, Ctesiphon no longer enjoyed the absolute authority it had gained since the days of Khosrow I. The military reforms of the Kavad-Khosrow Anushirawan period had improved the performance of the army and led to a number of important successes. The generals had gained increased prestige among the nobility and populace as a result of their battlefield performance against the Romans, Khazars and Turko-Hephthalites. Even after the suppression of the Bahram Chobin rebellion, the generals had begun to form their own power-center in Sassanian society.[22] By the end of the Sassanian era, the military leadership was to play an increasingly important role in the Empire's affairs.

Khosrow II fights for his throne

Khosrow II has been sometimes vilified, mainly due to his lavish court practices and his disastrous wars with Byzantium. Khosrow's reign, however, was also characterized by his ability to promote the best generals of the Sassanian Spah to positions of leadership; these won brilliant military victories over both the Byzantines and the Turks. The promotion of arts, architecture, and learning continued unabated during Khosrow's reign.

The ascension of Khosrow II to the throne, however, did not end the leadership crisis. Bahram continued his own claims to the throne, setting him on a collision course with Khosrow. Although he had not won over all the Savaran, Bahram's popularity and charisma appears to have swayed much of the Sassanian populace to his side. To this day, the exploits of Bahram Chobin are vividly recalled in Iranian folklore. Thus, as Bahram was approaching the capital, he received a conciliatory letter from Khosrow. The King openly acknowledged the insulting conduct of his late father, Hormuz, against the general. Bahram was not only pardoned, but offered a high position (perhaps as marzban) in Ctesiphon. Khosrow even declared that he would seal his offer to Bahram by issuing a royal decree.

Bahram not only rejected Khosrow's offer, but insultingly ordered him to abdicate the throne. Khosrow was to then be demoted by Bahram into a provincial governor. To add insult to injury, Bahram threatened Khosrow with death if he did not comply. Undeterred, Khosrow sent Bahram another letter, in which his original generous offers were again put forward. Predictably, Bahram rejected these once again, and marched towards Ctesiphon. Realizing the danger at last, Khosrow assembled a force of the Savaran and decided to engage Bahram in the vicinity of Holwan. It would appear that Khosrow was concerned about the loyalty of his troops, and hoped to resolve his dispute with Bahram through negotiation. A face-to-face meeting availed nothing and exacerbated the animosity of the rivals. Khosrow and Bahram now prepared for battle. After seven days of maneuvering, Bahram surprised Khosrow's camp. There was no actual battle: Khosrow's Royalist Savaran simply deserted to Bahram's ranks. Bahram's subsequent capture of Ctesiphon and claims of kingship evoked little resistance.

With Bahram in pursuit, Khosrow fled first to Ctesiphon, and then towards Byzantine territory. Khosrow managed to cross the Euphrates and found sanctuary at Circesium, where he was received with honor. Khosrow immediately dispatched a letter to Emperor Maurice in Constantinople, asking for his assistance in regaining his throne. After consultation with his advisors, Maurice sent Khosrow a formal invitation to reside at Constantinople, where he would be treated as a son of the Emperor. As a further gesture of goodwill, Sassanian prisoners were to be released from captivity.

Maurice's apparent generosity to Khosrow came at a steep price. Khosrow was to surrender major portions of Sassanian Armenia, the strategic portions of Mesopotamia, and the fortress of Dara. The ceding of these areas would make the Empire as strategically vulnerable as it had been after Trajan's campaigns against the Parthians in 116. Byzantium would now be able to rapidly project its power into the heart of Sassanian Mesopotamia, threatening Ctesiphon. The western and northwestern provinces of the Empire would be vulnerable to potential Byzantine thrusts. Khosrow, who was desperate to regain his throne at any cost, accepted Maurice's terms. Maurice then provided Khosrow with 60,000 troops, as well as gold to finance his campaign. Iranian historians report that Maurice provided Khosrow with 40 wagons of gold.

Armed with a large Byzantine force, Khosrow invaded Sassanian Persia by entering from the northwest. At this juncture, 8,000 of the Savaran in Atropatene joined his banner. Khosrow then engaged elements of Bahram's forces, led by Bryzacius, near the Euphrates, further southwest. Although the specific details of the battle are unclear, Bryzacius was defeated, captured and later died under torture at a banquet attended by Byzantine and pro-Khosrow Sassanian royalty. It is likely that Bryzacius' units were outnumbered. This is because Bahram never attracted the allegiance of the entire Savaran force, especially the dehkhans who owed their position to the Sassanian throne. Khosrow soon captured Ctesiphon, and entered the city without encountering any resistance. Bahram avoided capture by fleeing the capital with his remaining forces.

Bahram made his last stand in 591, with 40,000 troops near the Balarat River in Armenia. Khosrow now had the support of a formidable coalition of Byzantine, Sassanian Royalist, Georgian, and Armenian forces. Although the tactical details of the battle cannot be verified, it is clear that at a crucial moment in the battle, 6,000 of Bahram's best Savaran defected to Khosrow.[23] This was mainly due to an amnesty that had been announced by Khosrow. The amnesty stated that warriors defecting from Bahram would be welcomed with full honors into the royalist camp. Bahram's military position soon unraveled. Khosrow captured Bahram's entourage, including his

Ancient Iranian horned lion-griffin statue, Sassanian or post-Sassanian, 5th to 6th century AD. (R Sheridan, Ancient Art and Architecture)

children, wives, and valuable possessions (including his crown). All was now lost for the rebel general who would be king.

The desperate Bahram fled towards Central Asia and settled in Ferghana.[24] Ironically, he sought asylum with the Turks. The Turkish Khagan, Barmuda, offered Bahram sanctuary, and later married his daughter to the ex-Sassanian general.[25] Bahram was soon assassinated, although the circumstances of this are not altogether clear. One account notes that Khosrow's emissaries to the Turks arranged to have Bahram stabbed with a poisoned dagger.[26] After Bahram's death, his troops departed for northern Persia. They entered through modern Gorgan and settled among the Dailamites.[27]

Although Khosrow II had finally secured his throne at Ctesiphon, he suffered from a serious image problem. First, he was strongly suspected of having murdered his father, Hormuz. To remedy this, Khosrow summoned his uncles Bindoe and Bastam to Ctesiphon to officially shift the blame of his father's death to them. Bindoe was duly executed as soon as he arrived in Ctesiphon. Bastam, however, remained in his northern satrapy. He soon attempted to set up an alternative government in northern Persia (Talysh, Dailam, Ghazvin) and Media, with Rayy (near modern Tehran) as the capital.[28] In this endeavor, Bastam had the support of those Savaran who settled in northern Persia after the assassination of Bahram Chobin. Bastam's bid for kingship soon ended, however, with his assassination. In the meantime, Khosrow had received an elite guard of 1,000 men from Constantinople to assist him in the suppression of his rivals in Ctesiphon.[29]

Khosrow's second image problem was perhaps even bigger than his first. The simple fact was that Khosrow had secured his throne with the aid of Persia's eternal rival, the Byzantine Empire. Khosrow's treaty with Emperor Maurice had resulted in the loss of much territory, including surrender of the powerful fortress-city of Dara, though Maurice had left Nisibis to the Sassanians. In the first 12 years of his rule, Khosrow remained very committed to maintaining his personal friendship with Maurice. Khosrow's sense of loyalty, however, was to the person of Maurice. As events were to soon show, Khosrow felt no obligation towards Byzantium, especially after the violent death of Maurice.

Recreating the Empire of Darius the Great

Phocas, a Byzantine commander stationed in the Balkans, assassinated Maurice in 602, and brutally slew the Emperor's entire family, with the possible exception of his son, Theodosius. When Phocas sent emissaries to Khosrow to announce his ascension as Emperor, Khosrow refused to acknowledge his authority and promptly imprisoned the envoys. Phocas' coup had given Khosrow the pretext to "avenge" the death of his former patron, Maurice.

Khosrow formally initiated the war with Byzantium by leading the Savaran in person in late 603 against the strategic fortress-city of Dara. Phocas dispatched General Germanus to confront Khosrow's forces. The Byzantines were soundly beaten, and Germanus died several days later from his wounds. Phocas dispatched another Byzantine army to crush the Sassanians. These fought Khosrow at Arxamus (Arxamoun). While few tactical accounts of the battle are available, Byzantine sources do report of Khosrow having "put together a fort with his elephants..."[30] This was probably a "moving fort" of armored elephants with cabs housing archers. One possibility is that the elephant formation was deployed in the center with cavalry on the flanks, and Dailamite infantry to the rear. While tactical considerations are open to debate, it is clear that the Byzantines were crushed again. The Sassanians are reported by Theophanes as having captured numerous Byzantine prisoners.[31] There were no Byzantine armies left to stop the Sassanians from capturing Dara, which fell to Khosrow after a nine-month siege in 604.

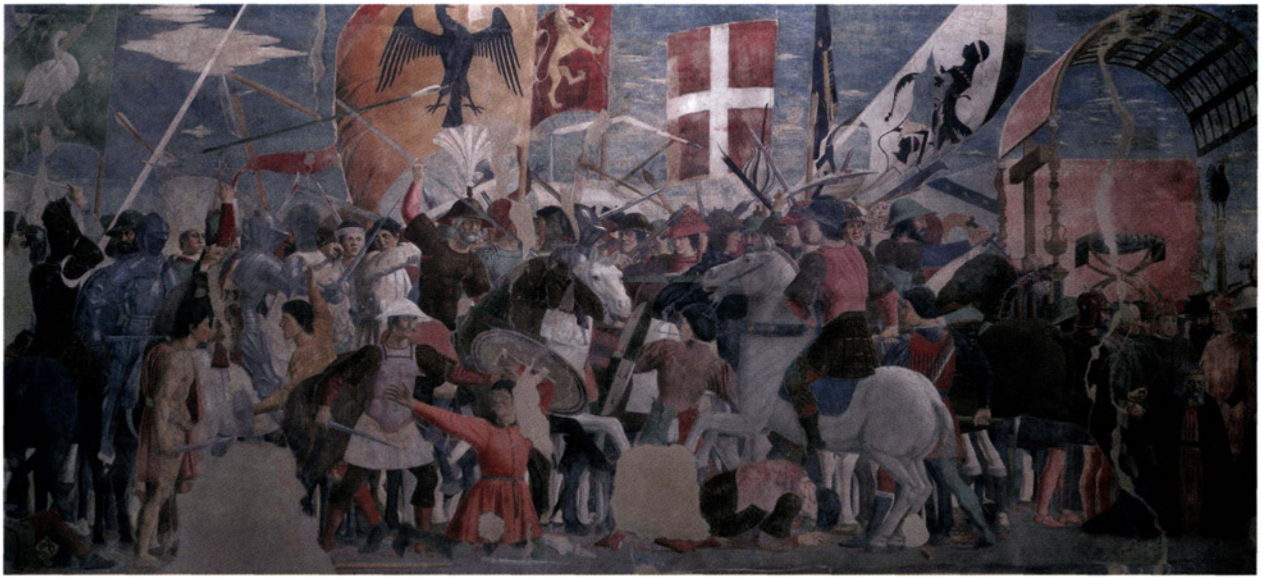
Interestingly, Khosrow was accompanied by a certain "Theodosius," who, it was claimed, was the late Maurice's son. Perhaps this was a way of obliging the anti-Phocas elements in the Byzantine armies and fortresses to defect to the Sassanians.[32] With the capture of Dara, Khosrow withdrew from the battlefield and handed military operations to his best generals, including Rasmiozan or Farrokhan Shahrbaraz (lit. Boar of the Kingdom). These generals were entrusted with the task of ejecting the Byzantines from all of Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, Armenia, and Egypt.

The fall of Dara resulted in another round of military disasters for the Byzantines, especially in Mesopotamia. Emperor Justinian had spent huge sums of the Byzantine treasury on fortifications facing the Sassanian Empire in the 6th century AD. These fortifications had been more or less successful at containing previous thrusts by the Savaran. It was these fortresses that Shahrbaraz conquered one by one between 604 and 610. Northern Mesopotamia was cleared of Byzantine troops after the fall of Amida, Mardin, and Cephas. Notable was the fall of Tur Abdin, which fell to the Sassanians for the first time.

In southern Mesopotamia, the Sassanians captured Resaina, Callinicum, and Edessa. The fall of "impregnable" Edessa was especially devastating to Byzantine morale. This was followed by the capture of Zenobia by Shahrbaraz on August 7, 610. In a calculated political move designed to win over the recently conquered populace, Khosrow ordered for the restoration of anti-Chalcedonian bishops and their churches.

The Sassanian commander Jhuan-Veh entered Armenia just as Dara was being besieged by Khosrow II. Jhuan-Veh, however, was far less successful against the Byzantines and was

This section of the left wall of the Cappella Maggiore of the Church of San Francesco in Arezzo, shows Heraclius defeating Khosrow. Other sections show Heraclius restoring the True Cross to Jerusalem. The long and costly wars between Constantinople and Persia exhausted both empires, allowing for eventual Arabian and Turkish expansion into regions such as Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, and Anatolia. (© 2006 Alinari/Topfoto)



defeated near Yerevan in the spring of 604.[33] Khosrow relieved Jhuan-Veh and appointed Datoyan in his place. The change in command improved Sassanian battlefield performance. Datoyan crushed a combined Armeno-Byzantine force in the village of Gerik and withdrew south to Atropatene.[34] The command of Sassanian forces in the Caucasus changed again to General Senitam Khosrow (*c.*AD 605–606). He immediately thrust from Atropatene into Armenia and laid a trap for the Byzantines, led by General Theodosius Khorkhoruni, at Anglon.[35] The Byzantines were caught unprepared and suffered heavy losses. In another Sassanian attack, Theodosius was captured.

The fall of Anglon allowed the Savaran to advance west towards Anatolia. Senitam Khosrow crushed another Byzantine force west of Theodosiopolis.[36] This created a dangerous gap in Byzantine military defenses, and several fortresses were soon captured by Senitam Khosrow. The mantle of command now passed to Ashdad Yazdayar, who defeated a Byzantine force at Basean, chasing them as far west as Satala. Yazdayar then turned back east to lay siege to the fortress-city of Theodosiopolis. Interestingly, Yazdayar was accompanied by the late Maurice's "son," Theodosius, perhaps in an attempt to get the defenders of Theodosiopolis to defect. What is certain is that Theodosiopolis fell to the forces of Yazdayar. All of eastern Armenia was now in Sassanian hands with the Byzantines effectively confined to the western marches of Armenia.

At this juncture, Shahen became general and continued the Caucasus campaign. The Byzantines made their final stand near Theodosiopolis, and were again decisively defeated. Shahen completed the task of clearing the Byzantines from the Caucasus by 611.[37] Interestingly, the Armenian Church was allowed to prosper, perhaps in an attempt to win over all the Armenians. Strategically, Shahen was now able to thrust into eastern Anatolia and Cappadocia. Having lost their strongholds in Armenia and Mesopotamia, the Byzantines simply could not afford to lose in Syria. This would lead to the loss of all lands between Mesopotamia and Lebanon-Palestine. Such a scenario would also dangerously expose western Anatolia and the capital Constantinople to Sassanian military action.

The situation of the Byzantine Empire at this time very much resembled Persia in the late Parthian era, when dynastic internecine warfare was rampant. It is no exaggeration to state that the Sassanian advance was as much a product of Byzantine disunity as it was of Sassanian military efficiency. There was bitter fighting between the Byzantines in Syria and Palestine, which resulted in the execution of Phocas and the crowning of Heraclius (r. AD 610–641) as Emperor. The military impact of these events on the Sassano-Byzantine war cannot be underestimated. Troops who could have been sent to Armenia or Mesopotamia had instead been preoccupied fighting a civil war. Those Byzantine troops who did engage the Sassanians in battle suffered very high losses, further undermining Byzantium's military position.

The Sassanians renewed their advance north and south in 611. In the north, Shahen thrust from Armenia into eastern Anatolia, and captured the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia by 613. The Jews of the city greeted Shahen's Savaran cavalry as liberators. Shahen then struck deeper into Anatolia, captured Melitene, and proceeded to link up with Shahrbaraz. In the south, Shahrbaraz had attacked Syria and captured Antioch, Apamea, and Emesa. Heraclius organized a counterstrike in the vicinity of Emesa, but his army was defeated.[38]

At this juncture, Heraclius made desperate pleas for peace to Khosrow. Not only did Khosrow reject these overtures, but he was determined to destroy what remained of the Byzantine Empire. Heraclius, now aware of the terrible challenge being faced by his empire, soon organized a bold counteroffensive. An army led by General Philipicus advanced into Armenia, then withdrew back into Byzantine territory. The objective was to distract the attention of the Sassanian high command from what was being planned in Syria. Heraclius and his brother Theodore, along with General Nicetas, had combined their armies to crush Shahrbaraz. The ruse failed as Shahrbaraz defeated their combined armies in Syria. Heraclius' forces were again defeated further in the north of Syria, at the Cilician Gates.[39] Cilicia was then annexed by the Sassanian Empire. Ironically, this was close to where Alexander had fought Darius III in 333 BC. The city of Damascus then fell to Shahrbaraz in AD 613, where a large number of Byzantine troops were taken prisoner.[40]

Continuous defeats had badly undermined Byzantine morale. The Byzantine garrison at Jericho was sent to defend Jerusalem against Shahrbaraz in 614. When the Jericho garrison saw the Sassanian troops, they took to their heels, allowing Shahrbaraz to capture the city in 20 days.[41] Like their coreligionists in Caesarea, the Jews of Jerusalem (who had sided with the Sassanians) hailed Shahrbaraz as a liberator. The General and his Jewish allies now treated the city's Christian population with special harshness: 50,000 of Jerusalem's citizens perished, and a further 35,000 were carried off as slaves. Jerusalem's churches were looted and burnt, the patriarch Zacharias was made prisoner, and the True Cross was transported to Ctesiphon.

These actions have led a number of historians to portray Khosrow's war as an anti-Christian crusade. This is not entirely accurate, as by the early 7th century AD Nestorian Christianity had spread into much of the western Sassanian Empire. There were major Christian centers in Khuzistan, western Persia, and northern Mesopotamia (especially Adiabene). While Zoroastrian by faith, Khosrow was himself supportive of Christianity in Persia as his wife, Princess Shireen, was a devout Christian. Numerous churches and monasteries were built around Ctesiphon, mainly at the behest of Shireen. The True Cross of Jerusalem was now placed in her care in Ctesiphon. Khosrow himself had adopted a Christian patron saint, Sergius the Martyr, to whom he reputedly attributed several of his early battlefield successes.

Shahen's thrust into the Anatolian mainland could not have come at a more inopportune time for Byzantium, occurring just as Shahrbaraz had captured Jerusalem in 614. Shahen's Savaran made large strides across Anatolia and reached the Mediterranean coast. Chalcedon on the Bosphorus fell to the Savaran in 614–615: Shahen was now able to gaze at the spires of Constantinople. During these operations, the ancient city of Ephesus had also been destroyed. The cavalry of Persia had not traversed such distances since the days of Cyrus and Darius. In sheer size, Khosrow II's Savaran had recreated the Empire of Darius the Great. This was perhaps Persia's finest hour: all of western Asia, with the exception of Constantinople, was now ruled from Ctesiphon.

Heraclius responded with a two-pronged strategy.[42] First, General Philipicus was ordered to drive towards eastern Anatolia in an endeavor to have Shahen pursue him and abandon Chalcedon. Heraclius' second (non-military) strategy was to open direct negotiations with General Shahen to end the war. Shahen received the Emperor with honor, and the senate in Constantinople dispatched three ambassadors to Ctesiphon. Shahen had in the meantime withdrawn from Chalcedon to pursue Philipicus. Heraclius' tactics failed. Shahen defeated Philipicus' eastern advance and returned to Chalcedon. The ambassadors, who had brought a letter to Khosrow imploring him to end hostilities, were simply executed in Ctesiphon. Khosrow's military successes had led him into a state

Sassanian carafe decorated with dancing girls, 6th/7th century AD. (akg-images)

of arrogant intransigence to peace offers. This ultimately led to his downfall and laid the seeds of the Sassanian Empire's collapse.

By 616, Sardis had fallen, a first since the conquests of Cyrus the Great. The last time Persian ships had sailed into Aegean waters had been during the invasions of Darius and Xerxes. The Aegean Sea was now again within reach. A fleet was built and launched against Constantia (Salamis) by 617. The attack, however, was more of a raid than an actual invasion. A more determined attack in 622 led to the fall of the island of Rhodos (Rhodes). Interestingly, a hoard of Sassanian coins has also been discovered on the island of Samos, probably dated to 623.[43] Nevertheless, the main effort was not directed against mainland Greece, but further south across the Mediterranean to Egypt.

After the capture of Jerusalem, Shahrbaraz had consolidated his position in Syria and Palestine. His next target was Byzantine Egypt, which he attacked in 618. The Savaran entered Alexandria by 619, and by 621 all of Egypt was under Sassanian occupation.[44] This was the second time in history that Egypt had fallen under the occupation of an Iranian empire. The capture of Egypt now denuded Byzantium of one of its wealthiest provinces and agricultural centers. With his military prestige further battered, Heraclius' situation now turned from dire to desperate.

Despite these successes, the Sassanians simply did not have enough troops to guard all of the territories they had taken, especially in Anatolia and the Caucasus. The long coastline of northern Anatolia and Armenia offered Byzantium the opportunity to conduct naval landings in the Sassanian army's rear. Much of the Anatolian interior was empty of Sassanian troops, which would allow the Byzantines to assemble new armies there and thrust east into the Caucasus, or south into Mesopotamia and Iran.[45] This capability had been vividly demonstrated earlier by the raids of Philipicus. The Empire's dramatic successes at expansion were to become its major Achilles heel: there simply weren't enough troops to garrison the conquered lands. Khosrow II's glory on the battlefield was soon to be eclipsed by a disaster that shook Persia to its core.

The battle of Dhu Qar: the Arab omen

Khosrow II had committed the tremendous strategic blunder of deposing Lakhmid King Nu'man III in 602.[46] The pretext for this action was that Nu'man had not intervened on Khosrow's behalf during Bahram Chobin's rebellion. Khosrow II alienated the leader of the Bani Sheiban tribe, who soon mobilized for battle with the support of other Arab tribes. The Empire dispatched 2,000 Savaran knights and 3,000 Arab allies. The Bani Sheiban alliance won an overwhelming victory at the battle of Dhu Qar in 610 over Khosrow's forces, the very year in which Heraclius came to power.

Interestingly, the Sassanian spah utterly failed to appreciate the military significance of this defeat. This may have been partly due to a foolishly misguided tendency to deride the Arabs as military inferiors. In this context, the defeat at Dhu Qar would have been viewed as an accidental setback. While the Byzantines and the Turks were rightly seen as formidable and dangerous warriors, the Arabs were apparently not viewed in the same light. The Lakhmid Arabs had certainly demonstrated their military potential in the recent past, for example at Callinicum; however the Sassanians tended to view them as members of the Iranian nation rather than foreigners. The Lakhmids were indispensable in their ability to act as the guardians of the Empire's southwest, especially in the south Mesopotamian-Arabian regions.

Khosrow II's decision to depose the Lakhmid dynasty proved especially inept, as this exposed the Empire's southwest to a potential Arab invasion. The Khandaq-Shapur lines of defense were by now in a dire state of disrepair, and no plans existed to build new fortifications in the region. Neither the lack of a proper defense line nor the poor military performance at Dhu Qar seem to have convinced the Sassanian spah of the potential dangers that could come from the deserts of Arabia. It is also possible that the danger had been recognized but a higher priority was placed on the war with Byzantium, the aim being to shift attention to the southern theater after a successful conclusion of that war. However, when the threat of a massive Arab invasion did finally materialize by 637 AD, the empire had no plans or countermeasures in place to stop them, largely as a result of the wars against Byzantium.

Turks invade from the northeast

The Turks in Central Asia decided to exploit the Sassanian Empire's military preoccupation to the west.[47] Just as Sassanian cavalry were entering Egypt in 619, the Turks and their Hephthalite subjects struck into Khorassan in northeast Iran and into Afghanistan. The empire reacted swiftly by dispatching a Sassanian army led by Armenian general Smbat Bagratuni and his contingent of 2,000 Armenian Savaran. The

Plate engraved with the Sassanian senmurv emblem, *c.*7th century AD. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto)

Turks were defeated in Tus, Khorassan, obliging them to withdraw into Central Asia. Bagratuni left a very small contingent of 300 men under Datoyan, a Sassanian prince. Bagratuni's army then moved west.

Nevertheless, the Turks and Hephthalites were still intact as a fighting force and took advantage of Bagratuni's departure. A full-scale invasion tore again into Khorassan, wiping out Datoyan's tiny garrison. The Turks and Hephthalites penetrated deep into the Iranian plateau, as far as Isfahan and Rayy. The Turks soon withdrew after collecting their plunder. Bagratuni returned, but this time decided to repeat the campaigns of Bahram Chobin conducted 30 years earlier. The Sassano-Armenian Savaran cavalry struck into Central Asia. The Turko-Hephthalite army was defeated and the Turkish Khagan was killed. The Turks and Hephthalites were broken as a fighting force, and many of the fleeing contingents were slain by the Savaran. Armenian sources report Turko-Hephthalite forces at around 300,000 troops or higher, although such high numbers are unlikely.[48] What is certain is that Bagratuni's victory secured the Empire's Central Asian frontier until the Arabian conquests.

Heraclius counterattacks: defeat and fall of Khosrow II

By 617, Heraclius was in a dire situation. He planned to send the royal treasury and his family away by ship; he was then to have joined the fleet. It is possible that Heraclius was hoping to escape with his entourage to Carthage where he would make his last stand. The "escape plan," however, was discovered, resulting in an uproar in Constantinople. At the behest of the great patriarch, the Emperor swore an oath at the church of Haghia Sophia, to never abandon Constantinople. Heraclius' subsequent egress from the city was not to be in flight, but in search of victory.

It was in Byzantium's darkest hour that Heraclius displayed his military genius. In the disastrous years of Sassanian conquests, Byzantine tactics were primarily defensive and remarkably unimaginative. Heraclius devised a plan that was as bold as it was elegantly simple: blows would be struck at the heart of the Sassanian Empire, just as her army occupied much of western Anatolia, Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. The Byzantine strategists realized that Khosrow had no fleet on the Black Sea. This gave Heraclius the option of landing an army by ships along the western coasts of the Caucasus.

Byzantium, however, had lost a good proportion of its best officers and professional troops. These had to be replaced before the unleashing of Heraclius' naval stratagem. Fortunately for Byzantium, Khosrow II's actions directly aided the recruitment efforts of Heraclius. Shahrbaraz's capture of the True Cross had deeply shaken the followers of the Greek Orthodox Church: they were especially incensed at the fact that the cross now stood as a trophy in Ctesiphon. As the war entered the 620s, Khosrow took away much of the wealth of the churches in Mesopotamia and Syria to finance his war effort. Heraclius was now able to frame the war in terms of a Christian religious crusade. Religious zeal combined with the need to liberate lost territory, resulted in the influx of a large number of highly motivated recruits. Byzantium also had ample access to high-quality manpower in the Balkans, and there was certainly no shortage of recruits in Constantinople.[49] Heraclius patiently rebuilt the shattered Byzantine armies, even as the Savaran stood at the gates of Constantinople. The Byzantine Empire had been financially battered and the imperial treasuries were exhausted, but the Orthodox Church assisted Heraclius by donating many of its treasures to the war effort. These were melted down and struck as coins, providing Heraclius with the funds he needed to pay for the army's reconstruction.

After five years of meticulous military preparations, Heraclius was ready. He arrived in Armenia in 622, and defeated a Sassanian force led by an allied Arab general.[50] Shahrbaraz now arrived to confront Heraclius in Armenia. After considerable maneuvering, Heraclius struck at Shahrbaraz and defeated his forces. While the military impact of these successes was negligible, they provided a major psychological boost for the Byzantines, as this was their first success in years. Heraclius was compelled to march west, as Turkic Avar invaders had now entered the Balkans and were threatening Byzantium. He then returned to campaign once more in the Caucasus. After celebrating Easter on April 15, 624, in Nicomedia, Heraclius arrived in Cappadocia. From there, he struck at Armenia and then south at Nakhchivan, just above Atropatene. General Shahrbaraz, who by now had thrust towards western Anatolia, was recalled to the east to deal with Heraclius in Armenia.

By 625, Heraclius was consolidating his position in the Caucasus. He recruited support from the Caucasian kingdoms and (more importantly) the Khazar Turks. Meanwhile, three separate armies led by Shahen, Shahraplakan, and Shahrbaraz were arriving to crush Heraclius. General Shahraplakan headed the "New Force" which included the Khosrowgetae and Peroozetai units of the elite Savaran, and a subordinate force led by Granikan-Salar. The New Force managed to catch up with Heraclius and after a hard-fought battle, defeated him in the Caucasus, obliging him to retreat to eastern Anatolia.[51] The Shahraplakan-Granikan force, however, had suffered such high losses that Heraclius' "defeat" became none other than the redeployment of an otherwise intact force.

Shahrbaraz now arrived in Armenia and joined Shahraplakan. Together they sought to destroy Heraclius before Shahen arrived. Heraclius overwhelmingly defeated the combined Shahraplakan-Shahrbaraz force. This was most likely achieved by skillfully exploiting the vulnerable flanks and rear of the Savaran cavalry.[52] Shahraplakan was killed, but Shahrbaraz did manage to escape. The Byzantines are said to have captured Shahrbaraz's "golden shield … dagger, spear, gold belt set with precious stones…"[53] While Classical sources agree on the destruction of Shahraplakan, the role of Shahrbaraz in these engagements is less clear. Some accounts have Shahrbaraz accompanying Shahen who, with a combined force of 30,000 men, were defeated by Heraclius fielding "an elite force of 20,000 men."[54]

Khosrow now assigned Shahrbaraz's "Golden Spearmen" Savaran to General Shahen, reputedly numbering 50,000 cavalry.[55] Shahrbaraz then departed with his remaining troops towards Constantinople to link up with the Turkic Avars. Realizing the danger, Heraclius responded by dividing his forces into three: one force was placed under his brother, Theodore, to confront Shahen, a second force to Lazica along the Black Sea, and a third force to defend Constantinople.

The decisive engagement took place between Theodore and Shahen in 626 or 627. Few details of the fighting are available, except for a hailstorm that allegedly blew into the Sassanian camp just as Theodore was advancing.[56] Theodore's victory must have been due to the new tactics that had been developed to counter the Savaran elite cavalry and other units.[57] Meanwhile, Heraclius' original strategy of preventing the three armies of Shahen, Shahrplakan, and Shahrbaraz from uniting against him had succeeded. Nevertheless, Shahrbaraz, perhaps the most brilliant Sassanian commander, remained at large and was advancing to Constantinople.

Heraclius' successes in Armenia had not yet turned the tide in Byzantium's favor. Shahrbaraz had crossed Anatolia and reached Constantinople by 626. An alliance was now struck with the great Khan of the Avars, who was encamped on the European side of the Bosphorus. Constantinople's formidable walls, however, kept the invaders at bay. The siege was opened by a fierce assault on the city's walls by the Avars and Slavs. They were unable to sustain their assault without the support of Shahrbaraz, who was situated on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Heraclius' fleet ensured that none of the Savaran would land on the European side to aid their Avar and Slav allies.

As Sassanian forces stood outside Constantinople, Byzantine sources report of Khosrow II having sent a secret letter to Kardarigan, Shahrbaraz's second in command.[58] In it the King asked Kardarigan to kill Shahrbaraz and return with the army to Ctesiphon.[59] The outstanding battlefield successes of Shahrbaraz had certainly made him a legend; but this may not have been to the liking of Khosrow II.

Heraclius allegedly intercepted Khosrow's letter. He then offered to show this to Shahrbaraz in a meeting at Constantinople. Having viewed the letter, Shahrbaraz entered into an alliance and personal friendship with Heraclius. The contents of the letter were then altered to state that Khosrow wanted 400 officers killed. This ensured that Shahrbaraz's army remained loyal to him. With a piece of paper, Heraclius had lifted the siege of Constantinople, and ensured the removal of Shahrbaraz's powerful army for the duration of the war. Whether Heraclius had already altered the letter for his own purposes before showing it to Shahrbaraz will never be known. The end result was that Shahrbaraz withdrew his support for Khosrow allowing Heraclius to finally win the war and force the Sassanians to sue for peace.

Heraclius' fleet had managed to sail virtually undetected from Constantinople and land in the vicinity of modern Circassia in the Caucasus. Even if Sassanian spies had reported on Heraclius' fleet, the Sassanians simply had no means of intercepting it at sea or predicting the fleet's possible landing sites. The combined forces of Heraclius and the Khazars of the Caucasus now numbered at 120,000 fighting men, vastly outnumbering the Sassanians.

The Khazars and Heraclius struck in 626. Yaghbu Khagan of the Khazars invaded Albania (modern Republic of Azerbaijan). Albanian sources report the slaughter of the population in Albania after the Khazar victory.[60] As in Albania, elements of the Georgian population are described as having been pro-Sassanian and rejoiced at the arrival of a small Savaran force of 1,000 cavalry.[61] Despite a determined defense, the miniscule force proved unable to prevent the linking-up of the Khagan with Heraclius in the city of Tbilisi in Georgia. Only Armenia remained to be secured by Heraclius before his march into Persia. Heraclius now gave the hand of his daughter in marriage to the Khagan. This was meant to cement the Byzantine-Khazar alliance in the upcoming invasion of Sassanian Persia. Heraclius and his Khazar allies now moved south into Armenia, where a large number of the local warriors joined him. The combined forces of Heraclius, Khazars, and Armenians now thrust into Atropatene. The Khazars soon became disheartened by the determined resistance of the locals. They soon withdrew in haste, northwards across the Araxes River.[62] Heraclius now thrust deep into Atropatene. He went from the west side of Lake Urmia, and from there moved across the Zagros Mountains, reaching the Tigris River in Iraqi Kurdistan. A smaller force may have also advanced into Maragheh in Atropatene.

Last stand at Nineveh

Khosrow was aware of the danger of Heraclius' fresh thrust. General Razutis was now dispatched to confront the Byzantine invasion force. Razutis first attempted to flank Heraclius by the rear. This was prevented by Heraclius' superb maneuvering. Heraclius now crossed the Greater Zab River and established his camp near the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Razutis approached the Byzantine force and deployed his army in "three wedge formations."[63] Before the battle was joined, Heraclius challenged a champion of the Savaran to a duel. Heraclius slew his opponent, followed by two other challengers, although the last did injure Heraclius on the lip. Interestingly, some Western historians have incorrectly narrated Razutis as having been killed in one of these duels.[64]

After the duels ended, Sassanian battle trumpets were sounded and Razutis deployed his three wedge formations. While tactical descriptions for this battle are not available,

This late Sassanian stucco plaque of a senmurv dates from the 7th–8th century AD. (© The British Museum/HIP/Topfoto) it is very likely that Heraclius' forces struck the formations where they were at their weakest (flanks and rear). By all accounts the battle was bloody and desperate. The Sassanians appear to have had the upper hand until Razutis and his three commanders were killed in hand-to-hand fighting. Meanwhile, the infantry, presumably Dailamite, gave a very good account of themselves. They had engaged Heraclius' guards and even reached Heraclius himself, as indicated by the thigh injuries inflicted on the emperor's horse, Dorkon.[65] After three hours, however, the battle was over and Heraclius emerged completely victorious. Perhaps most disastrous for Sassanian Persia was the loss of 50,000 irreplaceable professional warriors. This was the last major army of the Savaran that stood in the way of Heraclius. Their loss would be sorely felt in the imminent invasions from Arabia.

Heraclius now made a determined thrust towards Khosrow's grand palace at Dastegerd and fire temple at Shiz. Much booty and treasures were captured, along with 300 Byzantine standards that had been lost earlier to the Savaran. Numerous other Sassanian palaces were also destroyed. These included Dezeridan, Rousa, Bekkal, and Bebdarch. Meanwhile, the remnants of Razutis' army had managed to retreat in good order, and joined a force of 3,000 Savaran cavalry that had arrived too late to see action at Nineveh. Khosrow had ordered these forces to make their last stand just north of the capital Ctesiphon, at the Torua Canal. The bridges going across the canal were to be destroyed. This order was never carried out, allowing Heraclius to approach Ctesiphon unopposed. Heraclius now sent a letter to Khosrow stating:

> I hasten towards peace … for I do not willingly raze Persia, but after being forced by you … let us embrace peace ... let us extinguish the fires before it consumes everything.[66]

Khosrow predictably rejected the overture, but by now the nobles and surviving generals had turned against him. Shahrbaraz had also warned Heraclius against trying to capture Ctesiphon. It is reputed that Shahrbaraz told Heraclius to "avoid the fate of Julian."[67] Acceding to the General's request, Heraclius quietly withdrew northward to his winter quarters in the Caucasus. The internal political machinations of Ctesiphon now took their course.

The fall of Khosrow was very much a palace coup. Khosrow had named Mardan, his son with the late Shireen, as heir to the throne.[68] Mardan, however, was disliked by the magi. Mardan's half-Byzantine stepbrother Shiroe, from Khosrow's wife Maryam, was favored by both the magi and nobility. A plot was soon hatched to prevent Mardan from ascending the throne. The pro-Shiroe conspirators were 22 nobles who were allied with two of Shahrbaraz's sons. The coup was led by Gushnasp-aspa, the commander of the Ctesiphon Savaran. Shiroe was placed on the throne in February 23–24 of 628, and became known as Kavad II.[69] Khosrow was imprisoned in an infamous dungeon called "The House of Darkness." In an act of exceptional cruelty, Shiroe had Mardan executed in the presence of Khosrow. It is reputed that Shiroe also executed a number of his other siblings in the same way. Five days after witnessing the death of his favorite son, Khosrow was tortured to death. Thus was the tragic end of a monarch who, albeit briefly, had restored the dominions of the Achaemenids and had acted as the catalyst of a cultural renaissance that would soon be appropriated by the coming Islamic Empire of Arabia.

Heraclius' primary aim was the restoration of the status quo. By the end of the war, Heraclius had earned the respect of members of the Sassanian nobility by participating in battle alongside his troops. To that end, he had also created a personal friendship with Shahrbaraz. Irrespective of Heraclius' successes, however, the war had been a costly and bloody one for Byzantium. The Byzantines are estimated to have lost 200,000 first-rate officers and professional soldiers. The Sassanians must have lost at least a similar number. The magnitude of the senseless slaughter alienated the nobles from the throne considerably. As noted by ancient Armenian historian Movses Khorenat'si: "for how long will the streams of blood flow … on account of battle, the blood of Aryan persons of the country?"[70] Between them, the Byzantines and the Sassanians had lost well over 400,000 first-rate fighting troops. This resulted in a dangerous military vacuum that was ripe for exploitation by the empires' tribal neighbors, notably the Arabs and the Turks. The severe weakening of Byzantium and Sassanian Persia was well noted by Caliph Omar (581–644) and the Arab commanders in Medina. Indeed, the Arabs struck at both Byzantium and Sassanian Persia just ten years after the armistice had been signed between them.[71]

The legacy of Sassanian arts and architecture

Khosrow's battlefield successes were matched by an unprecedented expansion of artistic and architectural developments. In a sense, Khosrow had unleashed a "neo-Persian imperial style" of artistic and architectural symbiosis on a par with the Achaemenids of old. Khosrow rebuilt a number of cities and farms that had been devastated by decades of brutal wars. Canals were repaired and new ones were constructed. As the Empire grew, Khosrow commissioned the undertaking of a number of ambitious projects. Palaces were decorated with elaborate artistic works of the late Sassanian type, including audience halls supported by pillars of silver. Examples of Khosrow II's works include the Tagh-e-Bostan reliefs and Khosrow's palace of Machita.

The discussion of the development of Persian rugs would require a text beyond the scope of this work; during Khosrow II's reign carpet-weaving reached its pinnacle in pre-Islamic Persia. Carpets were woven of fine silks and wool, richly decorated with pearls and gems. Designed to cover the floors of the new palaces, these carpets were large, some up to 400ft (121m) in length. The famous Spring Carpet of Khosrow used rubies, diamonds, and strands of gold to mimic the flowers of spring. The carpet was captured by the Arabs in 637, who cut it into smaller pieces and sold it on the markets of Arabia.

By this time, a high level of craftsmanship had been attained by the silk industry in Iran. The Sassanians were importing Chinese silk, weaving it into costumes decorated with elaborate designs and jewels, and then exporting these to China. Chinese nobles and noblewomen were reported as wearing "Persian" costumes. Byzantine nobles also adopted Sassanian-style costumes, which were popular until the capture of Constantinople in 1453. The high demand for Persian silk costumes was viewed with some trepidation in Byzantium, leading the Orthodox Church to issue a decree denouncing these fabrics as "Persian flummeries."[72] The court of the Arabian Abbasid caliphs also adopted Sassanian dress.[73]

Chapter 18

Downfall of the Sassanians and the Islamic conquests

Kavad II and the ephemeral reigns

Kavad II presided over the peace negotiations with Byzantium. These rested on two major agreements. First, the True Cross was to be returned to Byzantium. A number of contemporary Western historians view this as the victorious conclusion of a "western Christian crusade" against the "non-Christian east." This view is somewhat simplistic in that it superimposes contemporary eurocentric notions of "east–west" geopolitics over the political, cultural, anthropological, and theological boundaries of antiquity. Theologically, Heraclius had defended Orthodox Christendom against the Zoroastrian magi and Aryan cults of Persia, yet even this analysis is an oversimplification at best. Much of Sassanian Persia was already Christian, especially in the western regions. Attempts at an "east–west" characterization also fail to consider the very strong links between the Aryan cults of Persia and those of the Celtic, Slavic, and Germanic peoples who, like the Greco-Romans, shared a common Indo-European origin with Persia and India.

The second agreement was to have Sassanian forces vacated from all occupied territories in Egypt, Jerusalem, Syria, and Anatolia and retire to their antebellum frontiers. The latter is significant as it is a testament to the vast extent of Sassanian military successes and how near Byzantium had come to total destruction. In practice, a number of Sassanian troops remained in Byzantine territory until the onset of the Arab invasions. The impact of these treaties on the war-weary Sassanian populace is difficult to ascertain; however, it most likely contributed to a general decline in morale. Heraclius himself was not interested in destroying the Sassanian Empire, as he appeared to realize its importance in keeping out barbarian incursions from Byzantium's east.

Kavad, however, rapidly exhibited his inability to rule. He soon ordered the execution of 30 of his brothers. At one stroke, the House of Sassan had been decimated. Kavad's sisters, Boran (Boran/Poorandokht) and Azar (Azermidokht), officially reproached their brother for his barbaric excesses. Kavad died in September 628,[1] and his only child, Ardashir III, was placed on the throne with chief advisor Mehr Hazez acting as regent, a man who reputedly ruled with tolerance and wisdom. This state of affairs did not last for long.

General Shahrbaraz, whose loyalty Khosrow had long questioned, had been slow in evacuating the Savaran from Anatolia and the Near East. These troops had never been overcome by Heraclius, who had wisely chosen to win their friendship by skillful diplomacy. Shahrbaraz, in a secret agreement with Heraclius, arranged to march into Ctesiphon and seize power.[2] Shahrbaraz himself had become increasingly Hellenophile as indicated by the names of his son Niketas and his daughter Nike. Heraclius and Shahrbaraz agreed to marry Gregoria, the daughter of Niketas, to Constantine, who was the heir of Byzantium; Nike was to marry Theodosius, a son of Heraclius. The possibility of Shahrbaraz having become a Christian is very likely; at the very least he was very sympathetic to Orthodox Christendom. Shahrbaraz led a cavalry force of 6,000 Savaran veterans, and possibly some troops from Heraclius, towards Ctesiphon, which rapidly fell to his forces in June 630.[3] Shahrbaraz assumed the throne and had the infant Ardashir III and Mehr Hazez slain. The General then married Princess Azar in a bid to attract the loyalty of the nobles. The Khazars who had meanwhile invaded Armenia were defeated with a Savaran force sent by Shahrbaraz to the Caucasus. For a brief moment, Byzantium witnessed the ascension of a Christian Shahanshah on the throne of Persia. Nevertheless, Shahrbaraz failed to gain the loyalty of the court and was assassinated in 629. His body was reputedly dragged through the streets of Ctesiphon.

The stability and authority of Ctesiphon now became dangerously unstable. Alarmed at the prospect of chaos, the nobles and generals appealed to Princess Boran to assume leadership of the Empire.[4] Boran accepted and her rule, had it been allowed to continue, may have allowed Persia to recover from the terrible Khosrow-Heraclius wars and their aftermath. Heraclius accorded Boran the highest respect and invited her to visit Constantinople. Boran was to fall victim to the deadly machinations of Ctesiphon's court politics; she was suffocated by a pillow in her own bed. Her sister, Azar, was then placed on the throne until she, too, was assassinated. At this juncture, there appeared to be no

Post-Sassanian dish depicting an lion hunt, late 7th–8th century AD. (© The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) more members of the House of Sassan left to rule. The nobility, however, discovered a 15-year-old descendant of the House of Sassan living in Istakhr. It would appear that his true identity had been kept secret for his protection, following the chaotic and deadly court politics after Khosrow's downfall. The nobles and magi convinced the young prince to assume his place as monarch of Persia.

Yazdegird III: heir to a tottering empire

Social and religious disaffection among the populations of Persia had gained considerable strength at the eve of the Arabo-Islamic conquests, as it had among the peoples of the Byzantine Near East and Egypt. These elements, combined with the exhaustion of Byzantium and Persia, and buoyant Arab martial spirit inspired by the new religion of Islam, certainly facilitated the subsequent Arab successes against Persia and Byzantium. The successes of Khosrow's reign masked a deep underlying malaise throughout the Empire. Few would dispute that, for all its technical progress and achievements in learning, Persia at the eve of the Arab conquests was an empire in which a wealthy elite had amassed a disproportionate amount of the Empire's wealth. Persia's splendor and glitter during the time of Khosrow II had been achieved at great cost and extravagance. The King is reported to have had 50,000 horses, mules, and onagers, 12,000 white camels, 1,000 elephants, 3,000 concubines, and 12,000 servants.

The Zoroastrian magi had failed to practice and implement the egalitarian principles of Zoroastrianism. Those magi, such as Mazdak, who advocated a return to the original teachings of Zoroastrianism and an extreme form of egalitarianism, were ruthlessly suppressed. The egalitarian ideals of the Manichaean and Mazdakite movements, however, remained firmly planted in the consciousness of the ordinary people of the Empire. The general population seemed acutely aware of a deep-rooted "classism" amongst the wealthy elite and magi, who viewed them as lower-class inferiors. The violent suppression of the Mazdakite and Manichaean movements may have resulted in an underground network of anti-Zoroastrian dissidents within Persia, although more research is required to verify this. The role of a certain Rozbeh, a disaffected magus,[5] in adopting Islam in Arabia and loyally supporting the Prophet Mohammed is well commemorated in Islamic history as well as the Sunni Hadiths.[6] Rozbeh adopted the name Salman Farsi (Salman the Persian). Salman provided much information to the Arabo-Muslims on Sassanian methods of warfare. In addition to the Zoroastrian-Mazdakite conflict, the Empire was now witnessing a greater sense of differentiation with respect to religions and other Aryan mystic cults. The latter included the Zurvanites and Mithraists, and the former was mainly represented by the large Nestorian communities of Khuzistan, Media, and Ctesiphon. There were also significant communities of Jews, as well as large Buddhist presences in the eastern regions, such as Nowbahar and the Bamiyan valley.[7]

All of the above elements led to the alienation of the ordinary citizens from the central government and nobility. These sentiments were amplified with the rapidly deteriorating economy and the poor performance of the agricultural sector. The bursting of the Euphrates and Tigris dams had resulted in catastrophic floods in Mesopotamia, furthering the economic malaise and agricultural shortages throughout the Empire. As the central government grew progressively weaker, Ctesiphon's control over the provinces began to slacken, a situation reminiscent of the late Parthian era. While the battered Sassanian army made a valiant but doomed effort at resisting the Arabs, "the people of Iran had no spirit to resist."[8]

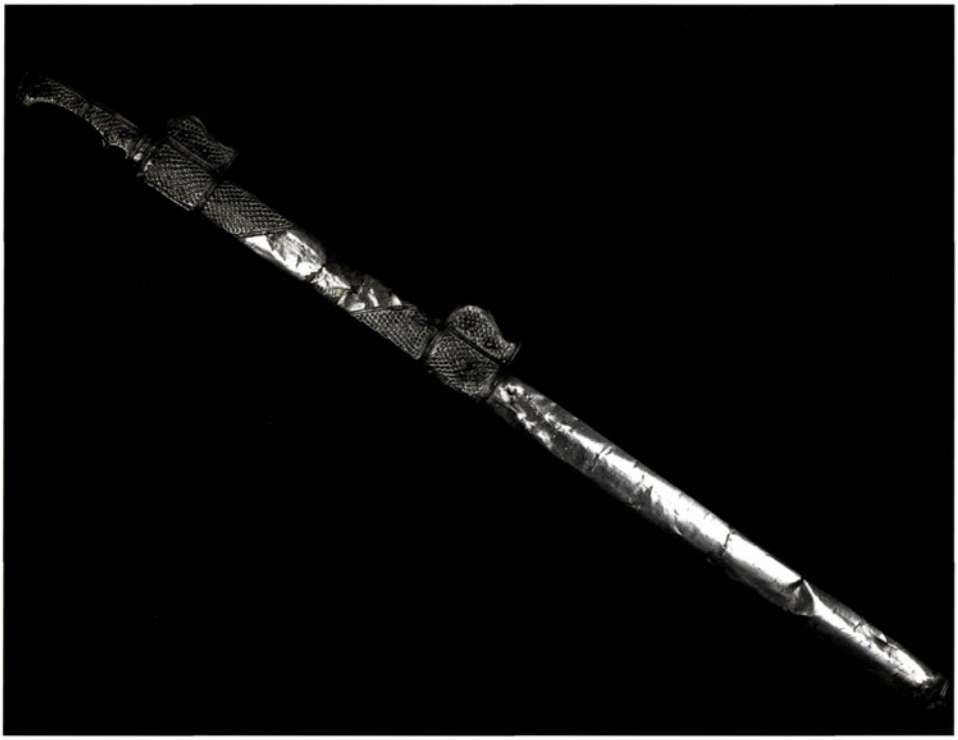
The sectarian conflicts and social problems had a devastating impact on the morale of the Sassanian *gund* (army). As noted by Motofi, the situation of the gund was characterized by "widespread chaos, hopelessness, dereliction of duty, lack of discipline..."[9] The fact that the bulk of the top-ranking professional officers and veteran warriors were either dead or incapacitated by the catastrophic Khosrow-Heraclius wars further undermined the gund's ability to reconstitute itself adequately. While a plentiful supply of weapons were available in the gund's depots throughout the Empire, the numbers of professionally trained warriors were dangerously low. Although elite contingents of the Savaran such as the Sarhangan, and professional infantry such as the Dailamites, were available to the gund, these were no longer available in the numbers seen in the early 600s. The loss of so many veterans also meant that there were few military instructors left to impart battlefield skills and martial spirit to the next generation. The army was still able to raise a formidable elephant corps and equip many troops, officers, and cavalry to fight for the Empire, but the fact remained that this army was but a shadow of its former self.

The reality was that the Empire needed years to reorganize its armies and to replenish its professional warrior force. Given Persia's chronic manpower shortage,[10] recovery would take at least a generation. But time was a luxury the Empire could ill afford. By the 630s, the Empire was militarily weak and exposed to invasion. Byzantium was too exhausted to attack and the Turks, while able to launch raids, were still recovering from their defeats at the hands of Bahram Chobin and Smbat Bagratuni. The final doom was to come from the tough Bedouin warriors of the Arabian Desert.

The invasion of Persia by the Arabs

The Arabs were well aware of the terrible toll that the Khosrow-Heraclius wars had taken on both Persia and Byzantium. As a master strategist, the second Arab caliph Omar fully realized that a golden window of opportunity had now opened for the Arabs to simultaneously strike Persia and Byzantium. As noted by Aloos: "most of them [the Arabs] had become heroes due to battles [during the Islamic wars of Arabia] ... they were now looking to the borders of the wealthy neighboring empires of Persia and Rome..."[11]

The first caliph Abu-Bakr organized the Arabs of Mecca into a caliphate theocracy, and issued a Jihad to expand the boundaries of Islam beyond Arabia. The Arabs declared that they were bringing a divine message of egalitarianism and social justice to the populations of Byzantium and Sassanian Persia. This call was to have a profound impact upon the disaffected troops and populations of Sassanian Persia. The Semitic populations of the Byzantine Near East, such as the Monophysite Christians, Aramaic speakers, as well as the Jews, also welcomed the Arabo-Muslims as liberators. Iranian traditions report a former Manichaean slogan of "Ham-e-Baradar, Ham-e-Barabar" (lit. all are brothers, all are equals) being revived during the Arab conquests, and possibly perpetuated by anti-Sassanian elements in Persia.

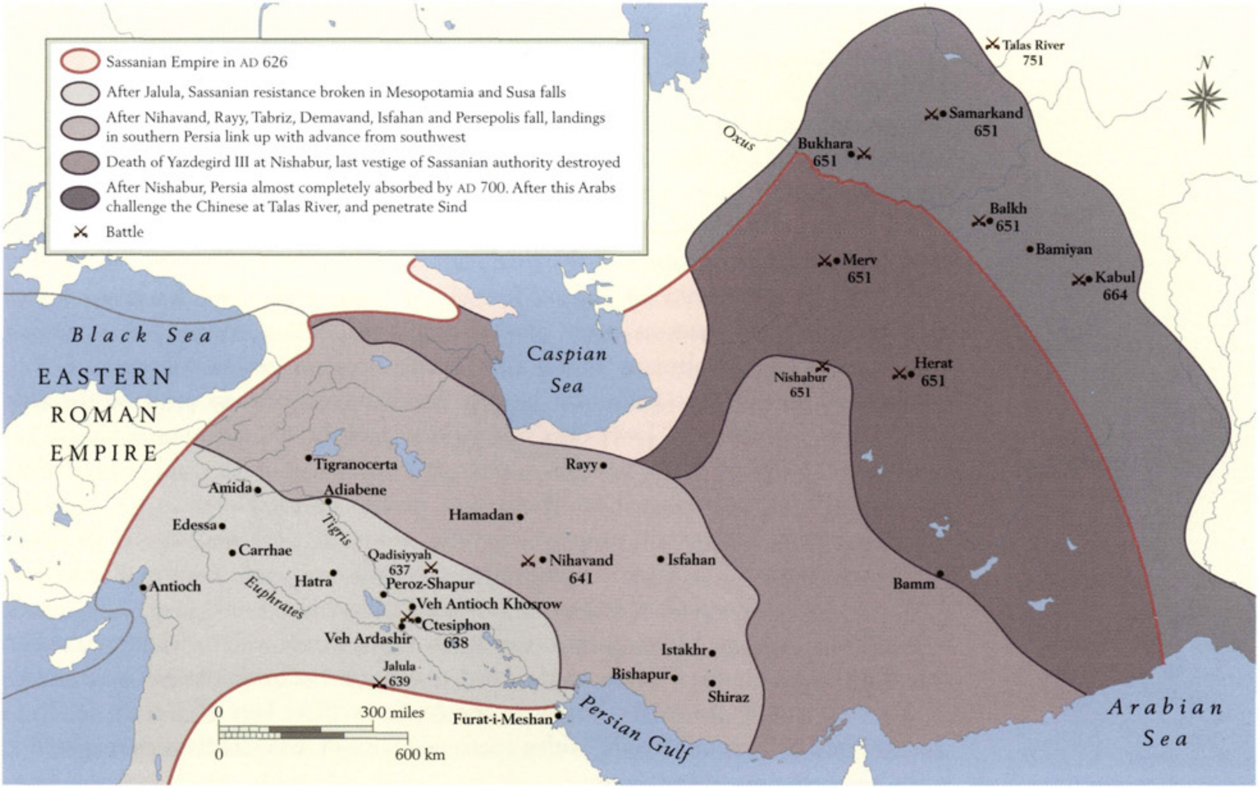


Sassanian silver scabbard, said to come from Dailaman, northwest Iran, 7th century AD. This sword scabbard is made of wood covered with silver sheets. These are folded around the wooden core and joined at the back, where a double thread of silver is soldered on as a reinforcement. The decorative wire spirals on the thread are also attached by soldering. The feather patterning is similar to that found on Sassanian helmets and daggers and is also known in Sassanian decorative arts. The scabbard would have been worn in an oblique position, suspended from the belt by two straps running through loops riveted on the back of two "P"-shaped attachments. These are set at some distance from each other on the edge of the scabbard, and are connected to reinforced bands which encircle it. This double-locket suspension system dates the scabbard to the late Sassanian period. (©The British Museum/ HIP/Topfoto)

Yazdegird III was fully aware of the challenge to Persia's existence, but he was militarily handicapped from the outset. While Yazdegird could count on capable and motivated generals to lead his armies, none could match the genius of fallen heroes such as Shahen, Shahraplakan, or Shahrbaraz. Byzantium's state of military exhaustion was no better than Sassanian Persia. While Heraclius could draw on excellent pools of manpower in Anatolia and the Balkans to replace his huge losses during the Sassanian wars, Byzantium was militarily spent at the conclusion of the hostilities. The Byzantine military leader, who had so distinguished himself during the closing years of the war with Khosrow, now proved exceptionally inept in his wars with the Arabs, as demonstrated by Theodore's performance at the battle of Yarmuk.

By the end of the Khosrow-Heraclius wars the Arabs had rapidly extended their rule over the entire Arabian Peninsula and forced the local Sassanian governors in Yemen from power. By the early 630s, the Arabs felt confident enough to take on the Sassanian Empire itself. The first Arab commander to strike into Sassanian Mesopotamia was Mosni Bin Haresa who occupied Hira, the capital of the former Lakhmid kingdom, by 633. Bin Haresa, however, proved unable to sustain his position and was soon defeated by the forces of *Eire-An Spahbad* (commander in chief of Persia) Rustam Farrokh-Zad. General Mihran launched a general counterattack in 634, and was apparently able to expel the Arabs from Sassanian territory. Even as he was forced to retreat, Bin Haresa is reputed to have sustained the morale of his Arab warriors by assuring them that they would eventually capture the "treasures of Khosrow."[12] More importantly, Arab commander Muthanna had been able to unite many of the Christian Arabs with their Muslim brethren by the spring of 634.[13]

The Islamic conquest of the Sassanian Empire 7th century AD


Sassanian Empire in AD 626
After Jalula, Sassanian resistance broken in Mesopotamia and Susa falls
After Nihavand, Rayy, Tabriz, Demavand, Isfahan and Persepolis fall, landings in southern Persia link up with advance from southwest
Death of Yazdegird III at Nishabur, last vestige of Sassanian authority destroyed
After Nishabur, Persia almost completely absorbed by AD 700. After this Arabs challenge the Chinese at Talas River, and penetrate Sind
Battle
Talas River 751
N
Samarkand 651
Oxus
Bukhara 651
Balkh 651
Bamiyan
Merv 651
Kabul 664
Black Sea
EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
Caspian Sea
Nishabur 651
Herat 651
Tigranocerta
Rayy
Amida
Adiabene
Hamadan
Edessa
Tigris
Carrhae
Qadisiyyah 637
Nihavand 641
Isfahan
Antioch
Hatra
Euphrates
Peroz-Shapur
Veh Antioch Khosrow
Ctesiphon 638
Bamm
Veh Ardashir
Istakhr
Jalula 639
Bishapur
Shiraz
0
300 miles
Furat-i-Meshan
Persian Gulf
Arabian Sea
0
600 km

The battle of the bridges

Undeterred by their previous setbacks, the Arabs again thrust into Mesopotamia and made a determined crossing of the Euphrates. The commander was Abu Ubeidah, who led the advancing Arabs to encamp on the western side of the Euphrates. They were met by a Sassanian force led by General Bahram, who had also brought the royal standard of Kaveh, an indication of how seriously the Sassanians viewed the battle. The Arabs crossed the Euphrates without proper preparation. Bahram now caught the Arabs in a field of his own choosing and the invaders were soon ensnared in a deadly trap. Bahram's strategy was to strike rapidly with a combined force of armored Savaran knights and battle elephants. The Arabs proved unable to halt the combined Savaran-elephant thrusts; the Arab general Abu Ubeidah was trampled and killed under the elephants' feet, although other accounts say he was drowned in the Euphrates as he fled with his men. The Arabs were certainly familiar with the Savaran's tactics: however, it would seem that Bahram reacted quickly and the Arabs did not have time to organize themselves properly after landing on the eastern side of the Euphrates. The sight of the elephants may have also panicked a number of the Arab horses. Faced with the death of their commander and unable to resist Bahram's strikes, the Arabs were forced to retreat back across the Euphrates River. Arab losses are described as 1,000 killed, 3,000 drowned in the Euphrates, 2,000 who deserted from the Arab army, leaving 3,000 men in the retreat.[14] This is perhaps the last battle in which the Sassanian gund was victorious.[15] This was also the last engagement in which the Sassanians successfully combined armored thrusts with missile strikes on the battlefield.

The battle of Qadisiyyah

Reinforcements and supplies had been ordered by Caliph Omar to arrive from Syria,[16] to bolster Saad Bin Ebi Waqqas, the Arab commander invading Sassanian Iraq. This had been made possible by the great Muslim victory against the Byzantines in Yarmuk, Syria, in 636.[17] Rustam Farrokh-Zad now took direct command of the Sassanian forces. His army left Ctesiphon and crossed the Euphrates to engage the Arabs, now encamped at Qadisiyyah, in the vicinity of Kufa. Most historians agree that the Sassanians fielded approximately three times as many combatants in the field as Waqqas. A significant proportion of the combatants among the Sassanian troops were raw recruits of poor training and morale, not unlike the baggage handlers and paighan prior to the early 600s. These disenchanted "lower-class" troops were probably the most susceptible to the egalitarian message of Islam, however in practice a number of nobles and highly trained professional troops also joined the Arabs. The nucleus of the Sassanian force was the surviving Savaran contingents, archers, Dailamites, and battle elephants, possibly organized into a battle group.[18] Rustam was hoping to avoid a conflict and sent a number of emissaries to Waqqas to seek a negotiated end to the conflict. Predictably, the talks failed at producing a compromise. Waqqas had every intention of occupying Persia, with or without Sassanian compliance. The ensuing four-day battle is known today as the battle of Qadisiyyah.

The first day of the battle, known to the Arabs as "The Day of Concussion" was characterized by Rustam opening with a combined force of armored Savaran knights and battle elephants. At first all seemed to be proceeding in Rustam's favor, with the Arabs seemingly hard pressed by the Savaran and battle elephant onslaughts. The Arabs, however, had learned from their defeat at the hands of General Bahram. Arab troops got close to the elephants, overcoming the escort infantry, then tore their girths, and destroyed their archery platforms. The Arabs also showered the Savaran with short *nawak* darts and overwhelmed them. Waqqas must also have found a way to neutralize the deadly Sassanian archers. Rustam realized that if the battle continued his forces would be decimated and a general withdrawal was ordered.

The second day of the battle ("Day of Succors") opened with gladiatorial contests, with the Arabs gaining the upper hand. In the third day of the battle, Waqqas had the upper hand from the outset. By the third day, Waqqas' forces had been joined by ex-Byzantine spearmen, experienced at neutralizing Sassanian battle elephants by blinding. Anti-Zoroastrian deserters from Rustam's army also informed the Arabs of similar techniques.[19] Nevertheless, Rustam held his ground. The remnants of the Savaran rallied and prevented the Arabs from gaining a final victory. Despite fighting the Arabs with relative success, Rustam inexplicably withdrew his army across the Atik Canal, presumably to use this as a natural barrier between him and the Arabs. Even as Rustam's forces began encamping on the opposite side of the canal, Waqqas organized a series of small "commando-style" strike groups. Rustam rose to the bait and launched a major attack on the Arab side of the canal on the fourth day. This was initially successful, obliging Waqqas' forces to fall back, and by noon the Sassanians were approaching victory. At this highly critical juncture in the battle, a violent sandstorm erupted which blew huge clouds of sand into the faces of the Sassanian troops, blinding them, breaking their cohesion, and preventing them from pressing home their final attack.[20] General Hormuz, who commanded one of the wings of Rustam's force, wavered, resulting in a gap in Sassanian lines. Waqqas rapidly pushed his forces into that gap, dooming the assault. The Arabs soon reached the command center of the Sassanian army, from where Rustam was directing the battle. In the ensuing melee Rustam was killed by the sword of Arab warrior Hillal, who reputedly shouted "By the Lord of the Kaaba I have slain Rustam!" News of Rustam's death spread like wildfire among the Sassanian troops, who now began to flee in a disorganized fashion.

A number of elite regiments, presumably elite archers of the throne and Savaran, did remain to defend the royal standard of Kaveh to the last man. The Arab capture of the Kaveh standard was a massive psychological blow, one that reverberates to this day among all Iranian peoples. Masoudi cites a total of 40,000 dead, and these would have included an unspecified number of elite troops.[21] If accurate, this would mean that the Sassanians had permanently lost one third of their original forces. There were also defections to the Arabs from among first-rate troops. Waqqas received the allegiance of 4,000 veteran Dailamite troops who had been among Khosrow II's elite units. These Dailamites, like other elite troops among the Savaran who chose to support the Arabs and embrace Islam, were settled in Kufa. The professional martial skills of these tough northern Iranian warriors were greatly welcomed by the Arabs, who provided them with greater pay than Arab troops.[22] It is now acknowledged that select contingents of professional Sassanian fighters were actively recruited by the Arabs throughout the Arab conquest of Persia, especially the Savaran elite cavalry.[23] The defectors now supported the Arab invasion.[24]

The victory at Qadisiyyah had taken a heavy toll of the Arabs as well, with perhaps up to one third of their forces lost.[25] Arab military exhaustion obliged Omar to suspend his conquests into northern Mesopotamia and Persia for nearly a year and a half. Nevertheless, the entire array of defenses in southern Mesopotamia had collapsed.[26] The brief respite did little to prepare Persia for the final onslaughts.

The fall of Ctesiphon

Omar finally ordered Waqqas to advance once again in 638. The combined Arab force numbered approximately 60,000 fighting men who advanced towards Ctesiphon. By the 630s, Ctesiphon and its environs, known as "Madain" by the Arabs, remained a formidable fortress-city. Ctesiphon and Asbanbar were situated on the eastern bank of the Euphrates with Seleucia, Veh Ardashir, Darzejan, Mahoze, and Sabat on the western bank.[27] These cities were built to withstand long-term sieges and the local inhabitants managed to resist the Arabs for two years.

Yazdegird's commanders had advised their king to abandon the capital before the Arabs reached the city, in favor of making a last stand in the mountains of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Militarily this decision appears to have been unwise. The Arabs were not as yet proficient in siegecraft, a mode of warfare in which the Persians excelled. Ctesiphon was a formidable city to take by storm, and had the Sassanian military chosen to stay and support the local citizenry there, this may have given their forces more time to prepare and organize in the north and east. The shock of the defeat at Qadisiyyah and the loss of the Kaveh symbol had so shaken the Empire to its core that sound tactical decisions were now giving way to desperation.

The Arabs first reduced the western bank of the Tigris before concentrating on Ctesiphon. The local inhabitants of Ctesiphon destroyed the major bridge connecting the western bank of the Tigris to Ctesiphon. The Arabs, however, compensated by building a bridge of their own, allowing them to finally storm across the Tigris. The local inhabitants made a desperate last stand at Veh Ardashir[28] against the Arabs who finally broke into all of Ctesiphon in 638. For the first time, the Arabs witnessed the riches, luxuries, arts, architecture, and sophistication of one of the world's great empires. Looting reached epic proportions. One-fifth of the looted goods were sent from Ctesiphon to Caliph Omar at Medina. So great was the haul of booty that every Arab soldier was able to appropriate 12,000 dirhams worth of goods, roughly the equivalent of 250,000 US dollars at the time of writing.[29] Nearly 40,000 captured Sassanian noblewomen were taken to Arabia and sold as slaves. The Arabs, however, captured much

The ancient Arg-e-Bam (Bamm citadel) near Kerman (ancient German). Built originally in 500 BC, this was virtually a fortress-city which remained inhabited until the 1850s. Sassanian and Islamic military architecture are both indebted to the rich legacy of military engineering on the Iranian plateau. The citadel was almost entirely destroyed by a massive earthquake in December 2003. (Topham Picturepoint/Topfoto) more than just booty; they appropriated the very symbols of Persia's splendor. Among the items to fall into Arab hands were the ceremonial swords of Kavad, Bahram Gur, and Khosrow II.[30] The Arabs also captured Khosrow II's crown, jewels, and royal garments as well as the sword of Heraclius that had fallen earlier to the Sassanians.[31] The gigantic Royal Carpet of Persia measuring 100ft x 100ft (30m x 30m), which featured rare jewels, gold, and silver in its weavings, was sent to Omar in Medina who tore the carpet into pieces and distributed them among to the people.[32] Perhaps most humiliating for Persia was the selling of the Standard of Kaveh in Arabia for 30,000 dirhams,[33] the rough equivalent of 600,000 US dollars.

Yazdegird's Defeat at Jalula

The news of Ctesiphon's collapse sent shock waves throughout the Empire, further demoralizing the leadership and military. The remnants of the once-mighty Sassanian professional Savaran and Dailamite forces were used to bolster the mass conscripts (120,000 men[34]) now forming the bulk of Yazdegird's army at Holwan, near modern-day Jalula. Arab sources report the Arab force of al-Hashem being 12,000 men. To what extent the size difference reflects propaganda is difficult to ascertain.

Al-Hashem did not achieve a major showdown for eight months after his arrival at Holwan. The Sassanians had dug a wide ditch in front of their forces and filled it with deadly iron spikes. Al-Hashem's cavalry, which must have included former Sassanian cavalrymen, finally lured the Sassanian force away from its powerful defensive positions. The ensuing battle is described as especially vicious in that:

> all arrows were exhausted, all spears broken and fighting by swords proceeded. The swords also broke or were damaged … then iron maces were used.[35]

The Arabs appear to have known exactly how and where to fatally strike the Sassanians on the battlefield, thanks in part to the ex-Sassanian forces now fighting in their ranks.

The remainder of Yazdegird's troops now engaged in a disorderly retreat and became ensnared in the traps originally intended for al-Hashem.[36] The ensuing Arab pursuit resulted in 100,000 Sassanians being killed.[37] Much booty and goods were then captured from the Sassanian camp, along with the wives and children of the Azadan nobility,[38] who had stayed in the camps. Disputes then appear to have broken out amongst the Arab troops as to the share of the spoils, causing a temporary lull in the Arab advance.[39]

Yazdegird himself managed to retire to Rayy, near modern day Tehran, which became the capital. General Khosrowshonum tried to retain the fortress-city of Holwan at all costs,[40] but failed. The loss of Holwan allowed the Arabs to soon reach Mahrod, where the local dehkhan cavalry force quickly submitted to al-Hashem.[41] By this time, morale appears to have all but collapsed, and any sense of loyalty to the House of Sassan and the magi had all but disappeared. Arab successes, combined with the fact that numbers of professional Sassanian troops had joined the Arabs since Qadisiyyah, further undermined the motivation to resist.

After the defeat at Jalula, the battered remains of the Sassanian gund were dispatched to engage the Arabs at Khuzistan and Persis.[42] The city of Ahwaz in Khuzistan fell, allowing the

Arabs to break into Persis proper.[43] Bahrain Island in the Persian Gulf was also used as a naval base to land troops into Persis,[44] leading to the fall of Istakhr after the battle of Tavoos.[45] The remnants of the Sassanian forces rallied under General Shahrak and, with the support of inhabitants of Persis, put up a powerful resistance. However, the Arabs prevailed and captured Ramhormuz, Tustar, Manadir, and Shushtar.[46] The resistance at Shushtar, one of the most important bastions of defense in southern Persia, was prolonged, bitter, and bloody. Hormuzan, the commander of the Sassanian forces in the southwest of the Empire, deployed his forces outside the city as the Arabs approached. The battle was yet another defeat for the Sassanians, and the survivors retreated into the city to prepare for a siege. However, one of the upper nobles had betrayed the city and that evening the conspirators killed the sentries and opened the gates to the Arabs. Hormuzan and what remained of his forces made their last stand in the citadel, sueing for peace only when supplies were exhausted.[47] Persis and Khuzistan took a long time to subdue, even as the caliphate reached Spain.

The Empire's last stand: the battle of Nihavand

Yazdegird now gambled what remained of Sassanian Persia's military forces in one last throw, and miraculously managed to assemble a force of 150,000 fighters. If true, the Sassanian gund must have gone to great lengths to arrive at such large numbers, given the huge losses of professional soldiers suffered since the 620s. Perhaps by now the surviving nobles and general populace realized that the Arab invasion was primarily aimed at subjugating Persia as a conquered province within the confines of a larger Arab Empire or the caliphate. Arab sources make specific reference to their concern at the presence of the elite Savaran cavalry in Yazdegird's army.[48]

The Arabs were now fielding many more troops; the *Futuh al-Baladan* states that the Muslims at Nihavand numbered up to 100,000 fighters.[49] The Arabs had appropriated Sassanian military arsenals and the assets of conquered cities, greatly increasing the treasury of the young caliphate.[50] This helped finance the conquest of Persia and Spain far to the west. By this time, the recruitment of non-Arab professional troops, mainly ex-Sassanian and perhaps some ex-Byzantine fighters, was fully underway.

Yazdegird's generals decided to make their stand near Nihavand, near modern-day Malayir in northwest Iran, a strategic node which stands astride the Caucasus, northern and eastern Persia. The command of the large army fell upon a veteran of the battle of Qadisiyyah, General Firoozan. Firoozan did not attack, as the bulk of his troops were, as in previous battles, raw recruits, lacking professional military training, especially in rapid maneuver. Rather than expose his recruits in a massive assault, Firoozan was baiting the Arab force to attack his positions. Extrapolating from Sassanian military literature and battle tactics, it is possible to speculate that Firoozan was hoping to maximize his chances with a simple three-stage strategy, using his archers to inflict significant losses on the advancing Arabs, supporting this advantage with hidden trenches and traps, and then annihilating the remnants of the force with the remaining Savaran and Dailamite infantry. the Arabs wisely chose not to accept the "invitation," as they knew of the deadly effects of Persian archery when defending a static position.[51] The Persian ability to unleash large numbers of missiles in short periods of time meant that any frontal assault would cause unacceptably high casualties. The Arabic decision in favor of inaction also served Firoozan's interests. The longer the Arabs stayed, the more their meager provisions would get

Post-Sassanian dish (9th–10th centuries AD) Note the senmurv Iranian bird-god and other creatures. (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, bpk Berlin, 2004)

exhausted. The sole Arab weakness during the invasions of Byzantium and Sassanian Persia was in logistics: the ability to maintain supplies for a large, and growing, army over prolonged campaigns. The Sassanian logistics system appears to have remained intact as late as 641, while the Arabs had yet to develop a comparable system of their own.

The Arabs resorted to guile to break the stalemate. They spread rumors that Caliph Omar had died and that the Arabs were withdrawing, then staged a false withdrawal. Firoozan's forces engaged in pursuit, and soon ran into prepared Arab positions, which attacked Firoozan's surprised troops, reputedly chanting "Allah Akbar" (God is Great) as they charged. The battle was hard-fought and bitter, with heavy losses to both sides. The Arab commander Numan was killed by an arrow, although this was kept secret until the conclusion of the battle.[52]

The defeat at Nihavand destroyed the remaining integrity of the Empire. Rayy was soon captured after the battle.[53] Many of the local marzbans, who had gained considerable autonomy after the fall of Khosrow II, chose not to resist the Arabs when they eventually broke into the Iranian heartland. These marzbans even provided the Arabs with access to high-quality weapons and professional troops. Nevertheless, many of the survivors of the battle of Nihavand soon joined the growing anti-Arab resistance movement, notably in northern Persia.

Resistance to the caliphate

It is no exaggeration to state that the wasteful wars fought between Persia and Byzantium facilitated the subsequent Arabo-Islamic conquests of the Byzantine Near East, Sassanian Persia, Anatolia, North Africa, and Spain as well as penetrations in France and Italy. Had Persia and Byzantium refrained from destroying each other's military potential, the course of history might have been very different.

Chinese history sources provide valuable information on the fate of the last Sassanians.[54] When Yazdegird was killed in 651, he was succeeded by his son Pirooz, who was still a boy. He and the surviving Sassanian nobles fled the Arabs by the 660s, making an arduous journey across the Pamir mountains and into China. Pirooz's sister was married to the Chinese emperor, who welcomed the Sassanian refugees and settled them near the imperial palace. China had already been settled by Iranians, which helped the arriving Sassanian nobles gain acceptance. Pirooz himself is said by Chinese tradition to have learned Kung Fu, and was hoping to lead a major army into his homeland to expel the Arabs. He did begin to clash with the Umayyad Arabs in Central Asia and recruited a number of Turkish warriors in Central Asia to support his cause. No invasion of Arab-occupied Persia occurred, however, and the Sassanians in China intermarried with Chinese nobility. Chinese archeologists have conducted many studies on the Iranian and especially Sassanian presence in China, with research teams having reportedly recovered some of the items lost during Pirooz's original flight to China. The Iranian settlers were to exert a profound influence on China as well as Japan.

Despite the Arab successes in conquering huge swathes of territory, and the crumbling Sassanian military machine, popular resistance against the Arab invaders remained strong. The city of Hormuz in southern Persia repelled the Arabs dozens of times before being finally subdued. Nevertheless, it was in the north where Iranian resistance finally solidified. The one singular Arab failure in all of their otherwise dramatic successes in Iran, Central Asia, Syria, North Africa, and Spain, was in northern Persia. Simply put, the Dailamites blocked Arab troops from entering northern Persia. As noted by Overlaet:

> Daylaman remained unconquered ... until at least the 8th century AD ... early Daylamite rulers even exhibited extreme anti-Arab attitudes and sought the restoration of the Persian Empire and the ancient religions.[55]

Local legends of Mazandaran report female resistance leaders, one such figure being a certain Azadeh.

The main difficulty for the Arabs was that they were facing very "European" terrain of mountains and dense forests in Mazandaran, Gilan, and Rasht. The Arab warriors were unable to stand up to the tough Dailamite infantry, who refused to bow to the authority of the caliphs, even after the complete collapse of the Sassanians. The Abbasids did manage to enter the region in AD 771 and stayed for nearly a century, but even then their authority proved sparse at best.[56] During the reign of Harun al-Rashid (AD 763–809), many Muslim Shi'ites fled to the Dailamites to seek refuge from the persecution of the Sunni authorities. The most notable of these were the Alids, who were either the descendants or followers of the Imam Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed. Prominent among these was a certain Sheikh Zayd, who began to win converts to Shi'ite Islam among the Dailamites. By the time the Buyid dynasty of the Dailamites seized power and took over much of Iran and Mesopotamia (including Baghdad), northern Persia was still non-Muslim. However, Shi'ism was gaining ground.[57]

The most enigmatic resistance leader to rise in post-Sassanian Persia against the caliphate was Babak (from Ardashir Babakan of Sassanian dynasty) Khorramdin (Persian: he of the joyous religion) of Azerbaijan. Babak Khorramdin (AD 795–838) and his supporters were close adherents of the pre-Islamic religions and cults of Iran. They were apparently a mixture of Zoroastrians and Mazdakites.[58] Whittow has noted that:

> Azerbaijan was the scene of frequent anti-caliphal and anti-Arab revolts during the eighth and ninth centuries... Azerbaijan had a Persian population and was a traditional center of the Zoroastrian religion... The Khurramites were a ... Persian sect, influenced by Shiite doctrines, but with their roots in a pre-Islamic Persian religious movement.[59]

By the time of Babak, the Abbasids had come to power and much of the Iranian population was increasingly weary of the Arab occupation. Eastern Iran had been especially disaffected after the Abbasid caliph had ordered the execution of the east Iranian leader Abu-Muslim of Khorassan around 755. The action was as cynical as it was cruel, as the Abbasids had used Abu-Muslim and the eastern Iranians to help oust the Umayyads. The Iranians had supported the Abbasid bid for power, thinking that their national aspirations would be respected. The Abbasids cared little for Iran, and were only interested in solidifying the caliphate. Abu-Muslim was executed as he had the potential of leading a dangerous anti-Arab revolt. The caliphate, however, failed to culturally assimilate the Iranian population.

Babak led his revolt in 816 in Iranian Azerbaijan, and soon gained a large following. His objective was to unify the Iranians into a massive anti-Arab revolt. His 20-year revolt made considerable headway. By 837, Babak and his followers were in control of much of northwest Iran. His main allies were generals Maziyar and Afshin. The movement collapsed when Afshin betrayed his Iranian comrades to the caliph. The Babak castle was evacuated, but Babak was captured and tortured to death. Many of the survivors of Babak's movement fled westwards, towards Byzantium, where "Byzantine sources talk of Persian warriors seeking refuge in the 830s from the Caliph's armies by taking service under the Byzantine emperor Theophilos..."[60]

The survivors of Babak's movement in Iran gradually became absorbed into various Islamic sects.[61] Thus ended the last organized rebellion meant to restore the order of ancient pre-Islamic Iran.

Chapter 19

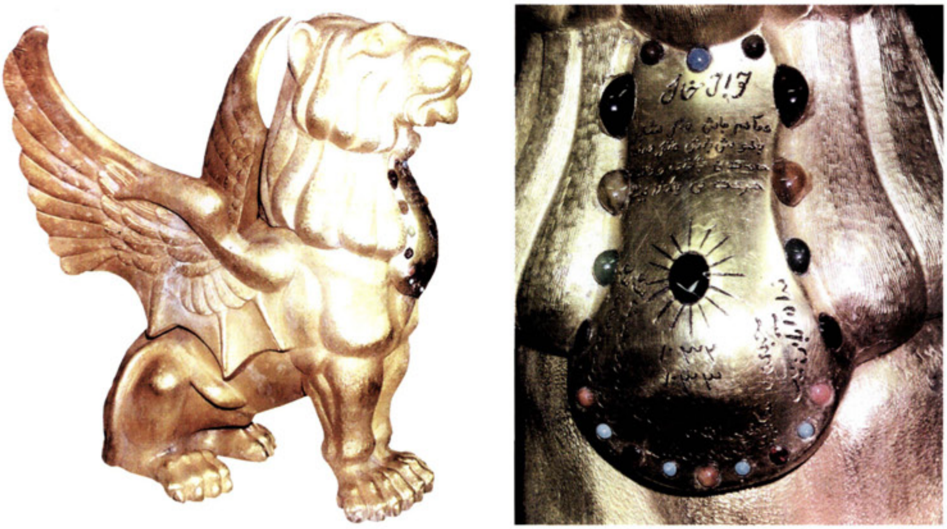
The legacy of Persia after the Islamic conquests

As Persia fell to the invading Arabs, much of her legacy was to be absorbed, subsumed, and transmitted under the aegis of the transnational Islamic civilization. Iranians were soon to be found throughout the Islamic Empire, from the borders of China to Spain. There were also many Iranian refugees who arrived in India, Far East, Europe, and Byzantium. Although the Sassanian Empire had fallen, the legacy of her civilization was to resonate throughout Asia, Europe, and the Arabo-Islamic realms for centuries. Below are a few highlights of that silent legacy. A thorough tabulation of all examples of Iranian influence is not possible, so a selection of examples in this chapter serve as illustrations.

The Sassanian legacy in Islam

The Islamic caliphate was not simply an Arabian entity. At its height, the civilization of the Islamic world became a synthesis of ancient Indian, Greek, and Persian civilizations. The Arabs conquered and assimilated many ancient civilizations. However, theirs was a multinational and multicultural empire, which at its height stretched from the borders of China to Spain.

The revival of Sassanian-style arts, architecture, culture, and learning became so pronounced during the Abbasid caliphate (AD 750–1258) that historians such as Hayashi have characterized that caliphate as the "neo-Sassanian Empire."[1] Many of the descendants of the Aryan azadan aristocracy and the Savaran cavalry class of the former Sassanian Empire served as scribes, government officials, scholars, and civil servants in the Abbasid caliphate.[2] It was they who acted as the vital link between the ancient civilization of Persia and the Bedouins of the Arabian deserts. Iranian scholars in Arab service translated many of the Greek, Pahlavi, and Indian scientific works into Arabic. These developments were of immense importance to Europe, which became the beneficiary of this knowledge in Spain. It is safe to assume that had the Iranians not translated many of the Greek works known to them, Europe may have never rediscovered them after the "Dark Ages." The Iranians exerted a powerful legacy in the Islamic caliphate with respect to arts, commerce,



Safavid-era gilded Iranian winged lion, found in Meshkheti region of Georgia, dated *c.*1622–1623 by the Institute of Manuscripts, Georgian Academy of Sciences. There is a jewelled and inscribed plaque on the lion's chest, (right). The first line of the inscription states in Persian "Be mighty as a lion and wise as a viper." (Courtesy Dr. David Khoupenia)

medicine, mathematics, sciences, crafts, architecture, engineering, and statecraft.[3] Many of the Iranian scholars of the Abbasid caliphate era hailed from those regions situated along the northeast regions of the former Sassanian Empire, namely the southern portions of Central Asia, modern Afghanistan, and Khorassan.

Arts and architecture

Sassanian artistic techniques in glassware, metalworking, tiling, and the use of animal motifs left a profound influence upon the Arabs and Islamic arts. In the Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar near Jericho, is a mosaic floor with decidedly Iranian themes. To the center stands a tree, reminiscent of the "Tree of Life" found in northern Iranian and Sassanian arts and mythology. There are also animal motifs, such as the predator lion grasping its prey, outlined in Sassanian style.[4] In modern Sammara, Iraq, there are still numerous stucco and wall decorations from the Abbasid era that are closely identical to more ancient Sassanian forms.[5] The late Sassanian elephant motifs found at Tagh-e-Bostan have also been replicated by Muslim weavers.[6] The mythological bird-dragon beast or simurgh became highly popular in Islamic arts. As noted by Blair and Bloom, "Senmurv [simurgh] … from Iranian myth, are found on contemporary [Islamic] textiles and architectural decoration."[7] The arts of the post-Sassanian era enjoyed a new "renaissance" during the Safavid era (AD 1501–1736) with examples such as the tile works of Ardabil in the Safaviyyeh quarter, or the tile decorations and Quranic inscriptions on the mosque of Masjid-e-Sheikh Lotf-o-Allah in Isfahan.[8]

Sassanian architecture made a profound impression on the Abbasids. The Abbasid caliph al-Mansur selected the small Iranian estate-village of Boghu-dad to become the capital of his empire. Iranian architects were bought to design the new metropolis. As noted by Levy:

> With the foundation of Baghdad… His [al-Mansur's] new buildings were of Persian design … it is evident from the architectural terms employed in Arabic that it was by Persian builders that such features were introduced as arches and domes, porticoes and balustrades, windows, ventilators, and water-spouts.[9]

The Sassanians had made large strides in architecture by the time of Khosrow I. One of their innovations was in vaulting techniques; their invention of the squinch finally solved the problem of placing a large circular dome over a square room. Much of the later Islamic architecture is derived from this Sassanian technique.[10] There are many vivid examples of Sassanian influence on the buildings and murals of ancient Baghdad. One example is found at the Talisman gate of Baghdad, one of the last additions to be made to the city by the Abbasid caliphs in 1221.[11] At the apex of the gate is the figure of a man with both hands raised, just like the capitals of Tagh-e-Bostan. The figure is flanked to its right and left by simurgh figures. The striking similarity of this structure to those of the Sassanians centuries earlier is remarkable. The structure was destroyed during World War I.

Mathematics

Persian mathematics in the Islamic era has its origins at the court of the Arabian caliph al-Ma'mun (AD 786–833), whose wife and mother were both of Persian descent.[12] Al-Ma'mun was a dedicated patron of mathematics, with a keen interest in both its practical and theoretical aspects. He ordered that Greek, Pahlavi, and Indian mathematical texts be translated into Arabic. Iranians played a vital role in this, mainly due to the Sassanian legacy of learning. Many of the "Islamic" mathematicians were of Iranian origin. Had it not been for the mathematical contributions of polymaths such as Khwarazmi, Biruni, or Khayyam, the world may have never seen the advent of advanced technologies such as rocket propulsion or computer technology.

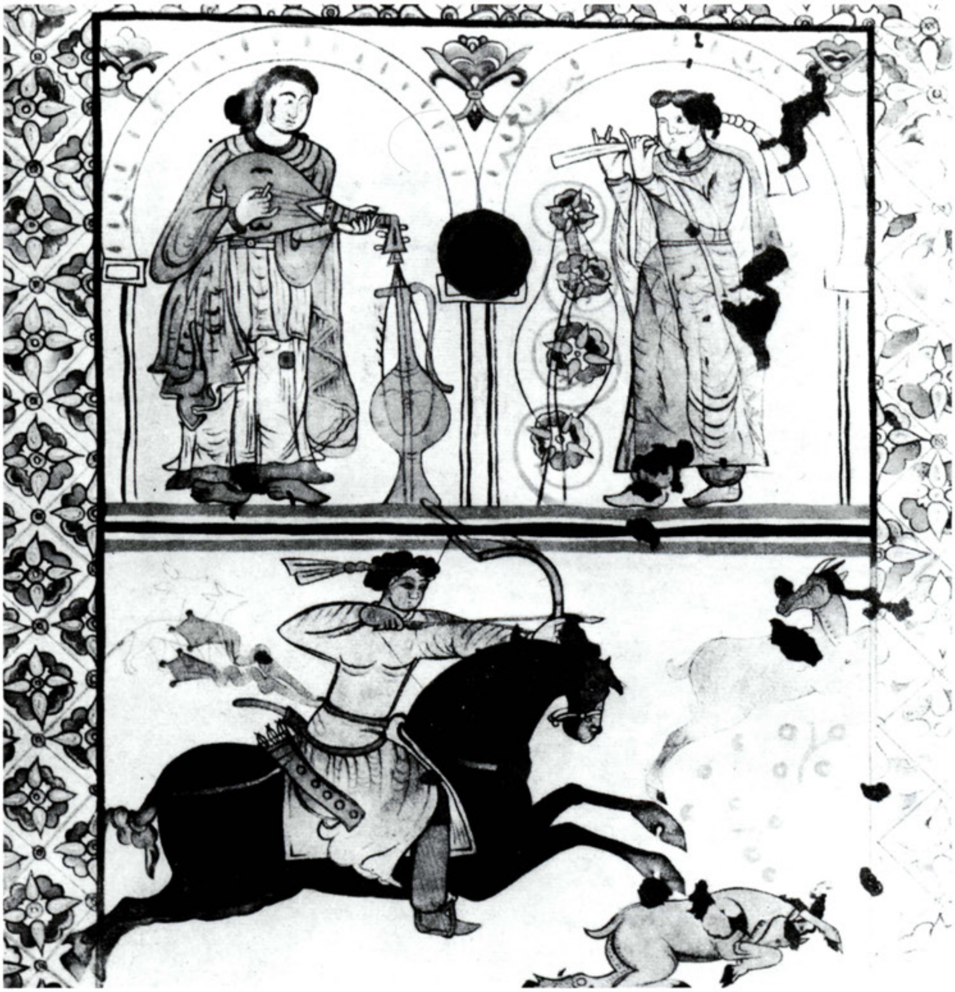
Mohammad Khwarazmi (d. 844) was born in Khiva, capital of ancient Khwarazm, a region that was increasingly Turkified, especially after the Seljuk Turk arrivals. Not only did he lay much of the basis of modern algebra (derived from Arabic *al-Jabr wa-al-Muqabilah*), Khwarazmi made a number of important contributions such as the invention of the algorithm, the introduction of Hindu numerals and zero to the Arabs, arithmetic procedures, trigonometric tables, and calculus. Abu Rayhan Biruni (AD 973–1043) was also born in Khiva. Some of Biruni's contributions to mathematics include geometry, series summation, combinatorial analysis, irrational numbers, ratio theory, algebraic definitions, trisection of the angle, and the revival of Archimedes' theorems. Abu al-Wafa (AD 940–998) was a Persian astronomer[13] who had a private observatory in Baghdad. He was one of the greatest mathematicians during the Abbasid caliphate. Al-Wafa contributed greatly to trigonometry, especially in his works with the sine theorem, sine tables, tangents, secants, and cosecants. Ghiasoddin Mohammad Kashani (15th century) was from Kashan and was the first mathematician to calculate the value of Pi to several places. Pi had already been known to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, and there are strong indications that Achaemenid engineers had used the value of Pi 2,500 years ago to "calculate the height of columns and the pressure on them, and distribute the tension on the conic section of each column."[14]

Sciences

Many scientific instruments and tools of learning had been used in Iran for thousands of years. Discoveries include a precisely tooled 4in. (10cm) ruler found in southeast Iran (near Zabol city, Seistan-Baluchistan province) dated to 5,000 years ago,[15] and the world's oldest "pen" found in Fars province dated to 1500–1100 BC.[16] Learning and the pursuits of sciences reached a pinnacle in Iran during the reign of Khosrow I. The Iranian legacy of learning was to be passed to the Arabs and Islam, with the onset of the Umayyad and especially the later Abbasid caliphates.

Famous Iranian chemists include Jaber Ibn Hayyan (d. 804 at Tus, Khorassan). Hayyan recorded a large number of his discoveries in a volume of books that influenced European chemistry up to the 18th century. Abu Rayhan Biruni discovered sulphuric acid and alcohol, and also formulated a theory of the earth rotating the sun in around AD 1000, long before Galileo made such a proposition to the Catholic Church in the early 17th century. Biruni also calculated the specific gravity of a large number of substances. This was a remarkable achievement for humanity in the pre-industrial age.

There was also an extensive Iranian heritage in fields such as zoology, botany, pharmacy, mineralogy, and lithology. What is of prime importance to the Europeans is how the Iranian legacy of learning not only influenced the Islamic tradition, but exerted itself on European scientific and technical achievements such as the discovery of gunpowder, textile technologies, and even perfumes.



Fresco in the castle of Qasr-el Heir el-Kharbi, Palmyra. Dating from the 8th century, it shows profound Sassanian influence in artistic motifs and style. The lower panel also shows Sassanian influences in Islamic Arabian equestrian archery. (© 2003 Topham Picturepoint/Topfoto)

Engineering: a prototype developed

The influence of Iranian engineering can be seen in the example of the windmill. The first appearance of a wind-powered machine was a prototype developed in the workshop of a Greek inventor named Heron. His design for the shaft and rotating blades were set in the horizontal position. Neither the Greeks nor the later Romans exploited the machine for agriculture or the generation of power. Knowledge of the technology existed among the Iranians, and by the late Sassanian era or the early Islamic era, the first true windmill appeared in the eastern Iranian realms (modern Khorassan and west Afghanistan). Modern scholars agree that Iranian engineers completely redesigned Heron's original invention.[17] The Iranians inverted the shaft holding the blades from a horizontal to a vertical position. The shaft and rotating blades were housed within a mud-brick tower with air ducts which allowed the wind to turn the blades. The blades, up to 12 of them, were made of tough fabric. This windmill was originally designed as a corn-mill. By the 9th century the Iranian design had been adopted throughout the caliphate, and had spread eastwards into India and China by the 1200s. The design appears to have spread to Arab-ruled Spain as well, reaching England by 1137.[18] In England (not Holland as is commonly believed) the Iranian design underwent profound changes. English engineers combined the designs of Heron and the late-Sassanid Iranians. The English post-mill had the horizontal rotation, which allowed the entire structure to be rotated, and the

The influence of Sassanian arts and culture on Christian and European arts has been noted. Examples can easily be found to illustrate this for example, the style seen in the Cup of Khosrow on page 229 can be traced to later Western art, such as the 7th century coptic ivory of a Christian king, or the 12th-century carving of Christ as Judge of the World in the tympanum of the Saint Pierre abbey church in Moissac, France. (Hervé Champollion/akg-images) vertical rotation for the sails. The English adaptation was soon found across Continental Europe. The Dutch windmill today may lay claim to Greek, Iranian, and English origins.

This late 17th-century dagger from Iran, length 15½in. (39.7cm), is decorated in a manner reminiscent of Sassanian works of art over one thousand years older. (© The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

Medicine

One of Persia's greatest and enduring legacies in the world is the concept of the "hospital." Elgood has noted that: "The modern hospital is a direct growth from Persian foundations."[19] The "modern" hospital had appeared in Jundishapur, southwest Iran (near modern Ahwaz), by the time of Khosrow I in the 6th century. This was a Sassanian center of learning in which Indian, Iranian, Aramaic, and Greek scholars exchanged their ideas and worked collaboratively. The fusion of Persian, Indian, and Greek ideas and methods in southwest Persia was to have a major and enduring legacy on world medicine.

The Arab scholar, al-Qifti, writing centuries after the Islamic conquest of Persia, stated that:

> They [the Persians] made rapid progress in science, developing new methods in the treatment of disease along pharmacological lines so that their therapy was judged superior to that of the Greeks and Hindus.[20]

Nevertheless, this achievement was only made possible by Persian collaboration with scientists of Indian and Greek descent. Al-Qifti confirms this by further stating that: "their [the Persian] physicians adopted the scientific methods of other peoples and modified them by their own discoveries. They elaborated medical laws and recorded their work that they had done." Al-Qifti's description of their techniques resembles modern scientific research methods.

The conquest of Islam eventually brought the hegemony of the Jundishapur School of Medicine to an end. The Arabian caliphs had built their new capital at Baghdad, and new Sassanian-style hospitals were being set up there. The most famous of the Baghdad hospitals was of Adud al-Daula. This facility was equipped with various surgical instruments and apparently had a well-stocked pharmacy. The Daula hospital was very modern, having an in- and out-patient system, nurses, staff that specialized in various areas of medicine, an almoner's office, interns, and externs.[21] In addition to the Daula facility, dozens of other well-organized hospitals were in place by the 12th century. According to Benjamin of Tuleda, who visited Baghdad in 1160,[22] there were at least 61 hospitals in the Baghdad metropolis.

Contemporary to Baghdad, a university-style hospital had been built at Shiraz, southwest Iran. This resembled the university hospitals of today, acting both as a care center and training center for medical students. The Shiraz facility was, in fact, part of a university that taught a wide variety of subjects such as medicine, mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, and philosophy. It is interesting that the Shiraz hospital and school of medicine continued to exist in Nairiz, near Shiraz, up to the early 17th century.[23] Regulation of training happened during the reign of Caliph al-Muqtadir, when in 931, comprehensive medical examinations were first introduced. Apparently, training until then was in the form of master and apprentice, with no apparent consistency from one institution to the next. The comprehensive system of training and examination also led to the development of a consistent ethical code.[24] There were two major Iranian contributions to the field of surgery: a technique for removing stones from kidneys, and a medical device to drain the abdomen in case of peritonitis.[25]

Zacharia Razi (Rhazes) (AD 860–923 or 932) was born in Rayy (near Tehran), Iran. He is perhaps Persia's best-known physician in history. A contemporary of the Abbasid caliphate, Razi produced two standard medical texts in Arabic, known as the *Kitab al-Mansuri* (The Book of Mansur) and the *Kitab al-Hawi* (The Book of the Virtuous Life). He was the first to develop a treatise for small pox and measles, use animal gut for sutures, or plaster of Paris for casts. In the 12th century AD, Razi's works were translated from Arabic to Latin. Razi was also a philosopher as well as a religious critic. Another Iranian of note in the field was the polymath Abu Ali Sina (Avecenna) (AD 980–1037) who was born at Afshana (near Bukhara in Central Asia). Sina produced two standard works, namely the *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine), and the *Kitab al-Shifa* (The Book of Healing).

Persia and the Europeans

The Iranian influence on mainland Europe may be traced as far back as the early Scythians of the modern Ukraine and Eastern Europe. The role of northern Iranian peoples in the formation of European culture has already been expostulated. The Sassanian realm was to also exert its own influence, both during and after its era.

Sassanian culture and arts became highly popular in the Caucasus, southern Russia, the Ukraine, and Eastern Europe. From the 6th century AD, there was "constant intercourse between the Sassanian Empire and eastern Russia."[26] This coincided with the renaissance in arts, crafts, and architecture in the Sassanian Empire between the reigns of Khosrow I and Khosrow II. Within Eastern Europe, especially south Russia–Ukraine, there was a revival of the Bosphoran-style arts which is also seen in Sassanian arts, leading to speculation that the Sassanian revival of Iranian culture may have also been linked to similar developments in Eastern Europe. The link would have been via the Caucasus, which had connected the Iranian plateau and the Ukraine for centuries.

Arts and fabrics

Many of the post-Sassanian artistic influences are through fabric. From the 11th century AD, many European churches sought to preserve holy relics and the bones of saints. These were often wrapped in fabrics of Sassanian design. "Oriental-style" fabrics were highly popular among Europe's Christian basilicas during the Merovingian era. These were variously hung in front of doors or in between columns. They were often used to screen sacred objects and were seen atop sacred coffins or sarcophagi. The artistic motifs inscribed upon the fabrics are overwhelmingly of Sassanian origin. These are inscribed within *circumrotatae* (isolated or contiguous wheel motifs) which house Iranian motifs such as animals (especially lions), trees, fire altars, hunters vanquishing beasts, mounted archers with drawn bows, or mythological bird-dragon beasts (simurgh). The bird-god motifs can be first seen in the Achaemenid era in Persepolis and earlier in Luristan. The simurgh motif is especially prominent in a Sassanian silk that was once used to wrap the relics of Saint Lupus. The fabric is now divided between the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The Museo Nazionale of Florence, Italy, also has fabric of the same motif and design. The European simurgh fabrics can all be traced to the 6–7th centuries AD, Sassanian Persia.

Persia: links with China and Japan

After the Arab conquests, much of the surviving Sassanian dynasty and other citizens of the former Sassanian Empire fled to China and also Central Asia. The Sassanians and the Chinese began a process of profound cultural synthesis, which resulted in what is known as the Sino-Persian arts. Ghirshman has noted that the Sassanian arrivals "initiated a new wave of Iranian influences" to the Chinese.[27] These were to also influence Japan.

Examples of arts that serve to illustrate the depth of Irano-Chinese synthesis from the post-Sassanian eras include Tang depictions of ladies engaged in the game of polo (introduced to China by the Sassanians), vases, and the *Tse-Niao* (bird) motif mural painting found in Kizil, Sinkiang (6–7th century AD). The Tse-Niao, wearing an elaborate collar, is holding a pearl pendant with three jewels in its beak. This is a virtual facsimile of a late Sassanian golden metalwork (6–7th century AD) that shows a pheasant wearing an elaborate collar, holding a pearl pendant with three jewels in its beak.[28]

The example of Chang'An

After the Arab Conquests, the cities of Chang'An, Lo-Yang, and Tun-Huang acquired significant Iranian communities as did Turkish-ruled Kashgar and Khotan in Central Asia. In Chang'An, Sassanian refugees were settled in four major quarters including a large settlement in the Western Market, southwest of the Imperial Palace. Chinese archives such as the Tang Shu records describe:

> Inside the [Ming Huang] palace, Iranian music is held in high esteem, the tables of persons of noble rank are always served with Persian food, and the women compete with one another in wearing Persian costumes...[29]

The Iranians introduced the Persian Gardens to China, dating to Cyrus the Great. One notable example of Chinese parks inspired by the Persian model includes the 17th-century park of Ch'ing Emperor K'ang Shi (1661–1722).[30]

There are a number of Chinese descriptions of those Sassanians who had taken up residence in China. The women of the *Po-sse* (Persians) are often described as having fair skin, blue or green eyes and dark or auburn hair. This is similar to the Chinese term *Hu-Jen* used for designating the fair complexions of the northern Iranians (e.g. Soghdians) and the proto-Celtic Tocharians who were encountered in northwestern China. The term is very similar to the original Japanese designation of *Kojin* meaning those with "green eyes-purple beards."

Japan: the treasures of the Shoso-in

As noted by Hayashi, the cultural fusion between the Sassanian refugees and the Chinese became highly favored by the Nara court in Japan.[31] It was in 733 when the Japanese

Pasargadae, the imperial capital of Cyrus the Great. It was at Pasargadae that the Achaemenids developed the design and arena of the Babylonian-Assyrian garden, resulting in the *Pari-Daeza* (Old Iranian: Park, Walled Garden) or the "Persian Garden." The term Pari-Daeza originally referred to the enclosed hunting grounds of the Median kings. Like its Mesopotamian predecessors, the garden at Pasargadae had a geometric design. There was an irrigation system formed by 2,952ft (900 m) of limestone channels. The garden was planted with fruit and cypress trees, flowers and exotic grasses. Pasargadae marked a unique Iranian symbiosis of local Medo-Persian, Anatolian and Mesopotamian civil engineering techniques, a harbinger of Persopolis and a vast array of subsequent architectural masterpieces in subsequent eras. The basic design of the Persian gardens can still be seen in the gardens of many small towns and villages in modern Iran. The Greeks adopted the Persian garden after Alexander's conquests. The Greeks, Romans and later European civilizations built parks and gardens on the Persian model and the breathtaking gardens of Versailles might never have existed had it not been for the gardens at Pasargadae. The Persian term "Paradise" entered the Roman lexicon, which facilitated its transmission to other European languages. (akg-images/Gérard Degeorge)

Emperor Shomu appointed Tajihi no Hironari as ambassador to Tang China. Three years later, vice-ambassador Nakatomi no Nashiro returned to Japan accompanied by a large Tang delegation. Also accompanying Nashiro was a Persian known as Li Mi-I. With the possible exception of the indigenous Ainu of northern Japan, this is the first official record of a Caucasian visiting Japan. It is very likely that he was one of the Iranian or post-Sassanian refugees who had fled the Arab occupation in Persia and Central Asia.

There are numerous examples of Sassanian influence on Japanese arts. One example is that of an 8th-century Japanese textile from Nara (from the treasures of the Shoso-in), which depicts hunters on horseback killing lions with the Parthian shot.[32] The motif, design, and posture of the Nara textile are virtually identical to a 4th-century AD Sassanian metalwork dish of Shapur II hunting lions with the Parthian shot.[33] Other Japanese items from Nara that are Sassanian in inspiration are glass bowls, metallic ewers, the *biwa* (Japanese lute), and brocades emblazoned with Sassanian-style warriors engaged in archery.

The legacy of Sassanian music

Sassanian music made a profound impression on the Chinese, and also on Islam and the Arabs. Arab-ruled Spain became one of the conduits of Iranian instruments, notably stringed instruments and the hammer dulcimer. The *Kanf al-Tuhaf*, a Persian treatise written in the 14th century AD, vividly describes the varieties of Iranian stringed, reed/flute and harp instruments.[34] Many of the instruments in that document have been lost in time, while some have appeared in places such as Arabia, Spain, the Caucasus, and China.

Sassanian musical styles reached their final forms during Khosrow II's reign. Sassanian music fell into three general categories: celebration, religious-mystical, and military.

Military music was further divided into battlefield music, formal court ceremonies, festive court ceremonies, military funerals, and the royal hunt. The last is vividly illustrated in the wall murals of Tagh-e-Bostan, depicting the royal hunt of Khosrow II. The relief depicts string and wind instruments as well as entire ensembles of mixed instruments. Court ladies can also be seen playing harps with the Savaran nobility clapping a rhythm. A Sassanian silver bowl from northern Iran (Mazandaran) shows Scottish-style bagpipes.[35] Other Sassanian metalworks display various flutes, mandolins, and castanets. Battlefield music is common to all ancient empires, yet in Sassanian Persia drummers, percussion instruments, and gongs were of special significance in coordinating attacks and maneuvers.

Festive court ceremonies could involve elaborate compositions with stringed instruments, such as the *Sabk-e-Kordi* (The Kurdish style) known as *Flamenco* in the west. The flamenco style can trace its origins to Dorian Greece and the Kurds of western Persia, suggesting the existence of Mede-Hellenic exchanges in music. Arab folklore from Sudan often states that the Greeks and Iranians exchanged musical instruments and enjoyed each other's music. This seems corroborated by the depiction, in the Aya Sofia mosque in Istanbul, of Empress Theodora welcoming musicians from Sassanian Persia.

Stringed instruments in the ancient world date back to the time of Hittites, Lullubi, and the Akkadians and earlier. During the time of Khosrow I, stringed instruments like the *Tar* (Persian: stringed, hair) developed into many forms. The tar is ancestral to modern Iranian instruments such as the *do-tar* (two-stringed), *se-tar* (three-stringed), or *chahar-tar* (four-stringed). A variety of instruments common among Tajiks, Afghans, Kurds, Persians, Lurs, and in the Caucasus can be traced at least as far back to the Khosrow era.[36] The Se-Tar was adopted and then modified in India, and the resulting instrument is known as the *si-tar*.

Post-Sassanian woven silk panel from Sogdiana dating from the 7th–11th century, found in Verdun Cathedral, France. (V&A Images/ Victoria and Albert Museum)

The legacy of Iranian music upon the Arabs has remained to this day. Many of the scales and styles of modern Arabian music are of Sassanian Persian origin. The classic Iranian tanbur is now believed to be an ancestor to the Arabian *oud* (lit. wood), an instrument believed to be tuned to Sassanian scales. The chahar-tar and tanbur were certainly popular with the Arabs who took them to Spain, where they may have played a role in the development of European instruments. The European guitar may be partly traced to a combination of the Greek *kithara*, and the *tar*, which was brought to Spain by the Arabs.

The Persian *bipa*, a stringed guitar instrument played upright with both hands, found its way to China, where it is now known today as the "pipa." It is almost certain that this export occurred when Sassanian nobles settled in China after the Arab Conquests; however, the instruments may also have been introduced by Soghdian Silk Route merchants in Central Asia.

The *santur* or *santar* (lit. 100 strings) is an Iranian trapezoid-shaped hammer dulcimer with 72 strings, played with light mallets known as *mezrab*. The instrument became popular among the Arabs, where it became adapted as the *qanun*, and played with finger-picks instead of mezrabs. The Turks also adopted the santur, which remains a key component of Turkish classical music. The santur arrived in Europe during the Middle Ages, most likely through Arab-ruled Cordova in Spain,[37] Seljuk Turk-ruled Anatolia (and the Ottoman Empire), and perhaps also through southern Italy. The santur was to be modified in the different regions of Europe, known variously as the *hackbrett* (Germany), hammer dulcimer (England), and *cymbalon* (Hungary and Romania). Not even the European harpsichord, despite its advanced keyboard, could replicate the range of dynamics produced by the santur, which were comparable to those of the modern piano. Approximately 200 years ago, European inventors combined the harpsichord and the santur, putting the harpsichord's keyboard upon the santur base. This resulted in an instrument that combined the best features of both: the piano. Essentially a mechanized santur, the modern piano has dampeners which stop the strings from vibrating, so eliminating the santur's harp-like sound.

The legacy of Sassanian seafaring

Arab and Indian sailors had long sailed in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. However, the Sassanians not only organized the numerous maritime links, but also controlled the maritime routes flowing from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. This allowed for networks of trade to extend from the Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea to the Red Sea, Indian, and Pacific oceans. Sassanian shipping also allowed for the diffusion of Sassanian culture in those regions, as far as the coastal areas of China, modern Vietnam, and the Pacific.[38]

The role of the Silk Route in enabling cultural and commercial links between the Iranian world and the east, and even between China and the Romano-Mediterranean world, has been noted.[39] However, the role of Iranian shipping in the extension of Iranian-Asian commerce is much less known. Despite the declining state of the Parthian Empire by the early 3rd century AD, Iranian shipping had extended as far as Southeast Asia. There is evidence that Parthian merchants were present in modern-day Tun-Sun on the Malay Peninsula.[40] Iranian trading activities have been recorded as far away as Tonking in the 3rd century AD.[41]

By the late Parthian or early Sassanian era, a number of technical innovations, including a redesigned rig, enabled a great boost in maritime trade. By the time of Khosrow I, Iranian marine technology had advanced considerably. Sassanian ships now featured over five sails (maximum seven). These were large ships capable of carrying up to 700 passengers and crew as well as "a thousand metric tons of cargo."[42] This technology did much to transmit the cultural achievements of the Sassanians, especially during the Khosrow I–Khosrow II eras, to the Indian-Pacific regions, Southeast Asia, and the Chinese coastal regions. This invention soon spread into the Indian Ocean by the late Sassanian era and further beyond to the Far East,[43] perhaps as far as Vietnam.

Sassanian seafaring to China, the Pacific Ocean, and the Far East

The Sassanian dynasty vigorously expanded the trading networks with the Chinese.[44] What is important to note is that the Iranians are specifically cited as "the carriers" of this maritime trade, a mercantile relationship that did much to introduce Sassanian cultural achievements to the Far East.[45] Sassanian networks in the Far East were along two general axes.[46] The first shipping line ran from the southern Chinese coasts to Vietnam. As noted by Schafer, Buttinger, and Setudeh-Nejad, Vietnam became a major node of cultural communication between Sassanian Persia and the Far East.[47] Iranian settlers reached into Cambodia as well, where some Sassanian works were translated and known to the local Champa dynasty (AD 192–1471) as *The Book of Anushirawan*.[48] It is worth noting that the *Orang Bani* of southern Vietnam today claim descent from the *Noursavan*, which is explained by Schafer as being in reference to Khosrow I.[49] Direct references to Khosrow I also exist in ancient Malaysia, where the monarch is referred to as Raja Nushirwan Adil (Malay: King Anushirawan the Just) in the Malyasian literary work entitled as the *Sejara Melayu*.[50]

The second maritime lane ran from the Malay Peninsula towards India.[51] Cosmas Indoplasticus is on record for his reports of Persian and Arab traders as far away as Sri Lanka (6th century AD). The Malay–India line also connected to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and may have gone as far as the Red Sea (ancient Arabian Gulf). Interestingly, Chinese merchants had become increasingly involved with the Iranians in the latter trade route. This process had become especially evident by the time of Khosrow I.[52] This raises the intriguing possibility that Chinese traders had come into contact with their Roman and Arab counterparts in the Roman-ruled regions near Sassanian Persia. Archeological expeditions in Southeast Asia have unearthed striking evidence of Iranian activities in the region, including 5th-century Sassanian coins in Yarang (Pattani region of Thailand),[53] and a polished Sassanian cabochon along the Mekong valley at the port of Funan in southeast Cambodia.[54] Interestingly, very little is known in the West of the vast extent of Iranian (especially Sassanian) shipping activities in the Far East. However, it is clear that the Sassanians were the first Caucasians to sail into the Far East, preceding the Europeans by centuries.

This network of trade was to continue for at least a century after the fall of the Sassanians to the Arabs.[55] By this time, Persian shipping had spread to the southern Pacific, as attested to by records of Persian merchant ships leaving Malay for Ceylon in 727. Even Chinese sources of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) record Po-sse ships sailing from Canton in 671.[56] A large Po-sse community was recorded in Hainan, China, as late as 748.[57]

The Sassanian legacy on Arab seafaring

The legacy of Persia in the seafaring of the Persian Gulf is readily admitted by Arab historical sources. Ibn-Baghdadi wrote in the 4th century AD that "the Persian Sea … is named after Persia because there has been no other country around it more advanced

The wall reliefs at Tagh-e-Bostan show military music being performed for the royal hunt of Khosrow II. String and wind instruments as well as entire ensembles of mixed instruments can be seen being played for the king. (© Livius.org)

than Persia; and verily the kings of Persia had, from the ancient times, the strongest hold, and they have to this day…"[58] Another Arab geographer and historian from early Islamic times, al-Maqdasi has acknowledged that:

> most people call it … the Persian Sea as far as the Yemen … most shipbuilders and ship captains are Persian… Most people in Aden and Jeddah are Persians … in Sohar they call each other by Persian names and speak Persian. Sohar is the center of Oman … and most of its people are Persians.[59]

Many modern Arabs now residing in the Arab sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian mainland can trace their ancestors to non-Arab Iran. These include the Bahrinahs, a mostly Arabized people of Iranian origin.[60] These are mainly situated in modern Bahrain, with unknown numbers still residing in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi. Another example are Komazerah, a people of Iranian origin who have mixed with later waves of Arab migrations in Oman.[61]

The late British-Lebanese historian Albert Hourani notes that the Persians of the Abbasid era were highly instrumental in the development and expansion of Arab seafaring and Persian Gulf commerce, and that many of the Islamic "Arab" mariners were, in fact, Persians who had adopted Islam and utilized the Arabic language in literature, theology, business transactions, and commerce.[62] These observations are fully corroborated by primary Islamic historical sources.[63] Hourani further notes that "naturally the Persians in time became Islamicized and Arabized, here as elsewhere."[64] Hourani and Mojtahed-Zadeh have identified a large number of Arabic maritime terms of Persian origin that have entered the Arabic lexicon from medieval Islamic times, including *didban,* meaning "look-out boy," and *bandar,* and *bar,* both meaning "port," as seen in the names of ports visited by the Arabs, for example, Zanzibar, and Malabar.

The Sassanian legacy on the Turks

The Islamic Turkish warrior dynasties of the Mamluks (in Syria and Egypt), the Seljuks (of Anatolia and Iran), and the later Ottoman Turks were highly influenced by Persia due to extensive and intimate Turkish contacts between them and Persia dating back to Sassanian times and earlier with Iranian peoples in Central Asia. As noted by Newark, "Sassanian Persian weaponry and armor influenced steppe warriors such as the Huns and Turks."[65] But the cultural intercourse between the Turks and Iranians was far more long-standing and profound, one that continues to this day in modern Turkey and Iran. The Turks were highly influenced by Persian culture, language, arts, architecture, and literature. In return, the Turks have left a profound imprint on Iran, one facet being language, as evidenced in the Turkish speech of modern Azerbaijanis. Many Mamluk officers, for example, had Persian titles, names (e.g. Jahangir), and admiration for Persian court customs, royalty, and ceremony. Persian medallion (*neshan*) symbols and "rang" were widely used by the Turkish Mamluks.[66] Persian was cultivated as the language of the court, administration, and literature by the Ottoman Turks as late as the 1880s.[67]

The rise of the Faris: Arabian knights

A number of historians have noted that Sassanian military literature, such as the *Khudai-Nameh, Ayin-Nameh,* and *Arteshtarestan,* allowed for the preparation of military manuals for the Arabian caliphs al-Mansur and al-Ma'mun.[68] The books on Persian military arts, by now all translated into Arabic, included topics such as the conquest of cities and forts, frontier defense, ambuscades, scouting, and archery. Islamic historians have acknowledged the Iranian legacy in the Arabian equestrian tradition. Ibn al-Nadeem (died 995/998) has corroborated the dependence of the early Muslim Arabs on the Iranians with respect to equestrian affairs.[69] Abu Obayda Mo'Ammar bin Mothanna admitted in the introductory section of his book on horsemanship, the *Al-kayl* (written 823–824), that his treatise was based on the teachings of two Iranians identified as Mohammad-e-Sistani and Abu-Yusef-e-Isfahani. The *Al-kayl* is considered as perhaps the best Arab treatise on equestrian affairs. The Arabs adopted Sassanian cavalry gear, such as the *khawda* (helmet) and horse armor, which they called *al-tidjfaf.* Perhaps the most telling legacy of the cavalry of Persia is found in the Arab word for knights. *Faris* means "knight" in Arabic; the word *al-Faris* can also mean the Persians, just as *Farsi* means Persian in Arabic. The Arab word for knight has become synonymous with "Persian" or "Persians."

The military influence of the Persians was not confined to cavalry, however, since the Arabs also adopted the Sassanian siege technology highly praised and respected by the Romans.[70] It is not clear to what extent ex-Sassanian equipment had been adopted in the early days of the Arab expansion. However, it is very likely that ex-Sassanian military personnel may have accompanied the Arabs into Spain. The name "Tangiers," for example, is not Arabic but Persian, being derived from *tang* meaning "tight."

Persia: a silent legacy?

Although the Achaemenid Empire is seen as the greatest of all the pre-Islamic empires of Persia, the Sassanian dynasty has also left its legacy upon Europe, Islam, Arabia, Asia, and

India. The legacy of the Sassanian Empire continues to permeate far beyond the furthest boundaries ever held by the Sassanid kings. Sassanian artistic and architectural themes have exerted a mighty influence in Europe, as seen in the Merovingian and Gothic motifs. Not only Northern Europe, but also Central Asia, Islam, Arabia, Byzantium, India, China, and Japan have all been influenced by Sassanian arts, architecture, music, culture (especially court ceremony and kingship), and mythology. Nevertheless, much of Persia's legacy remains largely unacknowledged in the western and modern Arabo-Islamic worlds.

Some of this may be traced to a phenomenon identified by the author as the "Alexander Mystique." This is the perception of the "oriental Persian" being permanently defeated and superseded by Greek (and by implication, Roman) martial prowess; the belief that Alexander the Great's victories were final, with Persia being permanently destroyed as a military power and as a civilization. This belief is continuously buoyed by the narrative drama of the Greco-Persian wars and Alexander's brilliant career. This misconception has been perpetuated to the present, mainly by a combination of education, popular culture, somewhat selective historical narratives (not to mention interpretation) as well as political propaganda. The Western world remains fixated on the Persian Wars and the Alexandrian conquests. Few are aware of or are willing to objectively acknowledge the subsequent history of Parthian and Sassanian Persia. The slanted perspective reported by much contemporary historiography with respect to Romano-Byzantine engagements against the Partho-Sassanians is summarized by Kennedy:

> Much of the published literature has been overwhelmingly Rome-centric … scholars whose sympathies and point of departure lies with … the Mediterranean world … a suspicion of bias is inevitable … the Rome-centric accounts are written from a modern western cultural perspective which still shares many of the Roman prejudices against orientals … as untrustworthy, effeminate and cowardly...[71]

Ironically, the Alexander Mystique did much to contribute to Roman defeats in Persia. The desire to emulate Alexander the Great often resulted in the underestimation of Iranian martial prowess and fostered a misplaced sense of superiority over Persian arms. Roman statesmen and military leaders including Crassus, Valerian, and Julian the Apostate met their tragic ends at the hands of the armored knights of Persia. All were, to a certain extent, psychologically propelled by the Alexander Mystique. The inability of many Roman statesmen to comprehend the strategic, political, and technological differences of the Persia of their time to that of 333 BC is remarkable. Cotterell further notes that "Caesar still dreamed of marching his legions in Alexander's footsteps as late as 45 BC…"[72]

Later the attitude of Greco-Roman superiority was replaced with a healthy respect for Iranian martial ardor. Roman leaders such as Crassus and Emperor Valerian were as impotent against the Savaran as Darius III had been against Alexander the Great at Issus. For the Romans, the Sassanian Savaran were possibly the most professional and dangerous of all opponents they had faced. It is certainly true that the Romans achieved a number of victories against Parthian and Sassanian Persia, however these never translated to the conquest of the Iranian plateau. The unstated military legacy of Persia was aptly summarized by Benjamin over a century ago:

> Until she attacked Persia, Rome had been invincible. For five centuries such generals as Crassus and Antony, Trajan and Julian, had dashed their armies against the frontiers of Persia in vain; for five centuries of hostilities Rome had made no impression on the Asiatics beyond the Euphrates. Army after army was shattered before the military genius and invincible cavalry of the Persian Empire … not one army of Persia surrendered to Rome – not one sovereign of Persia was led at the triumphal car of a Roman consul. And yet in her thousand years of conquest and war, Rome attacked no country with such pomp and preparation, or such formidable armies and armaments, as she hurled against Persia.[73]

Perhaps the most interesting development in Iranian studies has been the overall decline of programs and studies of Iranica in western Europe and the United States since 1980. While excellent departments do exist in prestigious universities such as Cambridge or Harvard, these cannot be compared to rapidly expanding Islamic, Arabian, and Turkish studies programs in the West. England now has the largest collection of Arabic and Islamic libraries in the world and the largest number of Arabic studies programs, while Iranian studies correspondingly decline. A similar process is underway in the United States where Turkish studies have been gaining in influence while Iranian studies stagnate or decline. It seems a growing number of Westerners are also unaware that much of "Islamic Learning" or "Arab sciences" is indebted to Sassanian Persia, a fact aptly acknowledged by the 14th-century historian Ibn Khaldun, known as "The Herodotus of the Arabs":

> It is a remarkable fact that, with few exceptions, most Muslim scholars … have been non-Arabs … all of them were of Persian descent … they invented rules of (Arabic) grammar…great jurists were Persians … only the Persians engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing … scholarly works … intellectual sciences were the preserve of the Persians, left alone by the Arabs, who did not cultivate them … as was the case with all crafts…[74]

The Iranians have left their cultural, artistic, scientific, theological, and political imprint upon the great peoples of history. This legacy has yet to be fully appreciated and has been commemorated in silence.

Endnotes

Chapter 1: Before the Achaemenids

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19 The term "Ossetian" is not of Iranian origin and is a Georgian designation for the northern Iranian peoples situated to the north of Georgia.

20 As evidenced in the immortalized dialog between the mythical Lord Krshna (like the Greek Kristos/Christ or "The Chosen One") and Aryan warrior-hero Arjuna.

21 K. F. Geldner (trans.), *Avesta, the Sacred Books of the Parsis* (Stuttgart, 1896), Yasht, 17.12; 8.18; 14.9.

22 For description of Aryan horse sacrifice rituals, see Herodotus (tr. R. Waterfield), *The Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, 216.

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25 See Aryan horse rituals among the Achaemenids in Herodotus, *The Histories,* III, 90; Aryan horse rituals among the Parthians in Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.31; Aryan horse rituals among the Sassanians in the *Bundahishn*, pp.120, 12–13.

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39 The results were published in Richards, "Tracing European founder lineages."

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41 Ibid., p.1259.

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later Parthian nobles of Iran; N. Sekunda, *The Persian Army 560–330 BC* (London, Osprey Publishing, 1992), p.20; statue of standing Parthian nobleman at Iran Bastan Museum.

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Chapter 2: Cyrus the Great and the early Achaemenids

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76 Herodotus, *The Histories*, III, 64.

Chapter 3: Darius the Great

1 See also *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.2*, Appendix II.

2 The Behistun inscription (IV, 80–88) lists the conspirators as Vindafarna, Utana, Gaubaruva, Vidarna, Bagabukhsha, and Ardumanish.

3 The two major sources for understanding these events are Herodotus and the first column of the Behistun inscriptions. Both have bias and historians have traditionally relied on a balance between these two sources.

4 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.98.

5 A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp.92–93.

6 Diakonov, "Elam," p.24.

7 Behistun inscription, II, 16; III, 26.

8 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.109.

9 Cook, "The Rise of the Achaemenids," p.219.

10 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.101.

11 Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p.93.

12 R. N. Frye, "The Rise of the Achaemenids and the establishment of their empire," in Gershevitch, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.2*, pp.200–291: p.216.

13 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.100. Many of the nobles who had seen their land confiscated were army officers.

14 The Behistun inscription, V, 20–30.

15 It is not clear whether this fleet was built specifically for this purpose or was part of a "Caspian fleet," for which very little evidence has been found.

16 K. Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry AD 224–642* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2005), pp.3–4.

17 Litvinsky & P'yankov, "Voennoe delo u narodov Srednej Azii v. VI–IV vv. Do n.e." *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* (1966, Vol.3), pp.36–52: p.44.

18 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.234.

19 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, VI, 24; VIII (Indica).

20 Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV, 44.

21 For an analysis of Darius' campaign, consult J. M. Baleer "The date of Herodotus IV, I, Darius' Scythian expedition," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* (1972, Vol.76), pp.99–132; G. C. Cameron, "Darius the Great and his Scythian (Saka) campaign," *Acta Iranica* (1975, Vol.4), pp.77–78.

22 Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV, 87.

23 Graf, Hirsch, Gleason, & Krefter, "Persia at the Crest," p.23. These authors estimate the maximum number of troops (presumably including logistics personnel) as 100,000 men, one-seventh the number reported by Classical sources.

24 The attempted resistance of the nearby Getae was crushed in the wake of the Achaemenid invasion force. See Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV, 93.

25 Ibid., IV, 89.

26 Ibid., IV, 97.

27 Ibid., IV, 102.

28 The elderly and children were sent north in covered wagons along with herds of horses and cattle.

29 E. V. Cernenko, *The Scythians 700–300 BC* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1983), p.25.

30 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.69.

31 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, pp.223, 226.

32 Cernenko, *The Scythians*, p.27.

33 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.69.

34 Cernenko, *The Scythians*.

35 J. Harmatta, "A recently discovered Old Persian inscription," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (1954, Vol.2), pp.1–14.

36 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.110; W. Hinz, "Achamenidische Hofverwaltung," *Zeitschrift fur Assyriologie* (1971, Vol.61), pp.260–311.

37 Plato (trans. R. G. Bury), *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), Epistles, VII, 332B.

38 Daniel 6: 8; Esther 1: 19.

39 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.135.

40 Josephus (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray), *Contra Apion II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 270–271.

41 D. B. Weisberg, *Guild structure and political allegiance in Early Achaemenid Babylonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp.96–104.

42 E. Porada, "Classic Achaemenean architecture and sculpture," in Gershevitch, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.2*, pp.793–827: p.793.

43 Strabo, *Geographica*, XV, 3.

44 First reported by the CAIS (The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies) on their website: "Remains of Achaemenid Palace Unearthed in Bolaghi Valley," http://www.cais-soas.com/News/2006/May2006/26-05.htm May 16, 2006.

45 M. Bahar & N. Kasraian, *Persepolis* (Tehran, Iran: Paksh-e-Ketab Cheshme, 1993).

46 Sh. Shahbazi, "New aspects of Persopolitan studies," *Gymnasium* (1978, Vol.85), pp.487–500.

47 W. Culican, *The Medes and the Persians* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965), p.89.

48 Dawson, *The First Armies*, p.208.

49 Culican, *The Medes and the Persians*, pp.90–93; Porada, "Classic Achaemenean architecture and sculpture," pp.798–799.

50 Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p.290.

51 Arthur Upham Pope was the art specialist of Iran between 1925 and 1960, during which he acted variously as art advisor to the Iranian government, established the American Institute for Persian Art and Archeology in New York, and became president of the International Association of Iranian Art. This statement was part of a speech made by Pope in the presence of Reza Shah in 1925. T. Grigor, "Re-Framing Rapid Modernities: American Historians of Iranian Architecture, Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Pope," *Arris* (2004, Vol.15), pp.39–55: pp.41–42.

52 J. Hicks, *The Persians* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), pp.86–88; Moorey, "Metalwork and Glyptic," pp.859–861.
53 See photographs in R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1962), pp.214, 219.
54 Quote from Sulimirski, "The Scyths," p.161. For detailed survey of the birth of Scythian arts in Iran: pp.161–165.
55 See detailed survery see Porada, "Classic Achaemenean architecture and sculpture."
56 Sulimirski, "The Scyths," pp.171–173.
57 P. Jacobstahl, *Early Celtic Art* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1944), p.156; J. Boardman, M. A. Brown & T. G. E. Powell (eds.), *The European Community in Later Pre-History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p.183.
58 Sulimirski, "The Sarmatians," provides a history of the development of the Bosphoran arts, their Greco-Persian synthesis and the migration of these artistic styles to western Europe. Anke also reported on finds in the Baltic-Scandinavian regions including a fragment of a helmet plate depicting dancing warriors in Sassanian costume, which looked almost identical to those from Valsgaerde and Sutton Hoo. This discovery has added to our knowledge of the movement of north Iranian, Ostrogoth and Hunnic migrations towards western Europe. B. Anke, *Studien zur reiternomadischen Kultur des 4.–6. Jh. n.Chr* (Weissbach: AntikMakler, 1998).
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60 Ibid., p.186.
61 Ibid., pp.306, 311–313.
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63 M. Y. Mostafavi, "The Achaemenid Royal Road," in A. Upham Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art* (Oxford/Tokyo: Oxford University Press and Meiji Shoho, 1967), p.14.
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65 Ibid., VII, 98.
66 R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp.1440, 1550.
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69 Mazzarino, "Le vie di communicazione," pp.75–83.
70 Ibid.
71 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VIII, 98.
72 Ibid., III, 89.
73 Mallowan, "Cyrus the Great," p.399.
74 Herodotus, *The Histories*, I, 94.
75 Mallowan, "Cyrus the Great," p.415.
76 Hicks, *The Persians*, pp.72–73.
77 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.116.
78 Ibid., p.132.
79 A. T. Clay, *Business Documents of Murashu Sons of Nippur Dated in the Regin of Darius II* (Pennsylvania: The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, 1904).
80 Mallowan, "Cyrus the Great," pp.405, 408.
81 W. Hinz, "Darius und der Suezcanal [Darius and the Suez Canal]," *Archaeologische Mittelungen aus Iran* (1975, Vol.8), pp.115–121.
82 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.52.
83 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII, 89–96.
84 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.71.
85 N. Aimé-Giron, *Textes Araméens d'Egypte*, (Cairo, 1931), p.61.
86 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.236.
87 Xenophon, *Anabasis*, I, 2, 5; II, 4, 13, 24.
88 Xenophon, *Anabasis*, III, 5, 9.
89 Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia*, p.93.
90 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.93.
91 J. M. Cook, *The Greeks in Ionia and the East* (London: 1962), pp.98–120, 132–133.
92 Ibid.
93 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VI, 44.
94 Ibid., VI, 112.
95 Ibid., VI, 113.
96 Ibid., VI, 113.
97 Ibid., VI, 117.

Chapter 4: Xerxes and Limits of Empire

1 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VI, 7.
2 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.126.
3 Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, pp.235–237.
4 A. D. H. Bivar, "A satrap of Cyrus the Younger," *Numismatic Chronicle* (1961, Vol.7/1), pp.119–127: p.123.
5 Cyrus the Younger was the satrap of Cappadocia, Lydia, and Phrygia.
6 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.222.
7 I. V. P'yankov, "Istoriya Persii Ktesiya I Sredneaziatskie Satrapii Achemenidov vo Konste V.B. do N.E." *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, (1965, Vol.2), pp.35–50: p.48.
8 Ibid., p.48.
9 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.222.
10 Ibid., p.222.
11 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII, 81.
12 E. Benveniste, *Titres et Nom Propres en Iranien Ancien* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1966), pp.68–69; see also T. N. Savel'eva & K. F. Smirnov, "Blizhnevostochnye drevnosti na yuzhnom Urale," *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* (1972, Vol.3), pp.106–123; Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.229.
13 For a thorough compendium of Iranian armaments of antiquity, see Khorasani, *Arms and Armor*.
14 D. Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army* (Stockport: Montvert Publications, 1992), p.60.
15 Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VII, 5, 68.
16 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII, 83.
17 C. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, 3 volumes (Paris, 1841–70), vol 2, pp.95–96; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII*, 17.59.3.
18 As cited and compiled by Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia*, p.92.
19 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.223.
20 Aeschylus (tr. J. Lembke, & C. J. Herington), *Aeschylus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), "Persians," pp.732–733. Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, VII, 4, 30. The Saka and Bactrians are reported as using battle-axes during the invasions of Greece, Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.234. Herodotus reports Mardonius selecting Bactrian and Saka units to fight alongside the Medes and Persians, *The Histories*, VIII, 113. The Arians, Chorasmians, and Parthians fought alongside the Saka during the invasions of Greece, Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p.114.
21 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII, 85; Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.234.
22 Herodotus, *The Histories*, VII, 85. N. Sekunda, *The Persian Army 560–330 BC* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), p.20, raises the possibility of Sagarthian warriors having battle-axes. This would appear logical during the invasions of Greece, as the hoplites were both heavily armed and armored and very well organized.

23 Herodotus *The Histories,* VII, 61–99.

24 Polyaenus, *Stratagemata,* VII, viii, 1.

25 Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army,* pp.50–51.

26 Ibid., p.55.

27 Ibid., p.52.

28 See Metropolitan Museum of Art, 41.2.9.

29 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VII, 71.

30 Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army,* p. 54.

31 These consisted of stone-tipped arrowheads and bows of palm construction, Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran,* p.234.

32 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VII, 89.

33 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran,* p.234.

34 Xenophon, *Anabasis,* V, 6, 8.

35 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VII, 184.

36 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran,* p.236.

37 For narration of this conflict see P. de Souza, *The Greek and Persian Wars 499–386 BC* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003).

38 Young, "The Achaemenids," p.151; Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire,* p.248.

39 Young, "The Achaemenids," p.155.

40 B. S. J. Isserlin, "The Canal of Xerxes on the Mount Athos Peninsula," *Annual of the British School at Athens* (1994, Vol.89), pp.277–284.

41 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VIII, 50.

42 The "wooden defenses" were installed in accordance with the local interpretation of the Oracle of Delphi's "wooden wall" which was believed to afford protection, Herodotus, *The Histories,* VIII, 51.

43 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VIII, 53.

44 Ibid., VII, 184.

45 Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire,* p.254.

46 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VIII, 89.

47 Ibid.

48 Artabazus and his 40,000 troops had refrained from participating in the battle.

49 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran,* p.96.

50 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VII, 210.

51 J. Cassin-Scott, *The Greek and Persian Wars 500–323 BC* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1977).

52 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History XI,* 19.21.3.

53 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran,* p.82.

54 Ibid., p.82.

55 Ibid., p.82.

56 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VII, 22, 56, 223; Xenophon, *Anabasis,* III, 4, 25.

57 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran,* p.82.

58 Herodotus, *The Histories,* VIII, 53.

Chapter 5: The Achaemenid Empire from Artaxerxes I to the rise of Macedon

1 He was known to Roman historians as Longimans (Latin: he of the long hand) and by modern Iranians as Ardashir-e-Deraz-Dast (lit. Ardashir/Artaxerxes of the long hand) in reference to his right hand being longer than his left.

2 After assassinating Xerxes I, Artabanus and Spitames told Artaxerxes I that it was Darius (a brother of Xerxes, like Artabanus) the crown prince, who had done the deed. Artaxerxes then killed Darius (presumably) after having Artabanus and Spitames put to death. For a full account see D. Lenfant (trans.) *Ctésias de Cnide. La Perse. L'Inde. Autres fragments* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), La Perse 29–30.

3 Ezra 7–8 documents the second return of Jewish captives of Babylonia during the reign of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah continues on from the story in Ezra, in which Nehemiah is permitted by Artaxerxes II to return to Israel and restore the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah 2.

4 Plutarch (trans. B. Perrin), *Parallel Lives,* 11 volumes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914–26), vol.XI Artaxerxes I, 1.

5 Thucydides (trans. R. Warner), *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), I, 104, 2.

6 For the Peloponnesian War see Philip de Souza, *The Peloponnesian War 431–404 BC* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), and Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars.*

7 De Souza, *The Peloponnesian War,* p.75.

8 Xenophon (trans. C. L. Brownson), *Hellenica Books I–IV* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918), I, 2, 19.

9 Xenophon, *Hellenica Books I–IV,* II, 8, 13.

10 Young, "The Achaemenids," p.136.

11 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* 1.2, 1.7, 1.8.

12 Plutarch, *Parallel Lives XI,* Artaxerxes 11.

13 Wiesehofer, *Ancient Persia,* pp.90–91.

14 Sekunda, *The Persian Army 560–330 BC,* p.27.

15 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VII,* 15.90.

16 Ibid., 15.93.

17 Ibid., 16.50.

Chapter 6: Darius III and the fall of the Empire

1 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VII,* 16.50.

2 British Museum, BM 71537.

3 Plutarch, *Parallel Lives XVIII,* Alexander 7–8.

4 Marcus Junianus Justinus (trans. J. S. Watson), *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), X, 3.

5 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* V, 11, 5.

6 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* II, 14.5.

7 Babylonian sources report of a huge increase in the size of the estates of the Achaemenid nobility in Babylon.

8 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran,* p.132.

9 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* II, 14.5.

10 W. Heckel, *The Wars of Alexander the Great* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002).

11 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.17.3–5.

12 Ibid., 17.17.3–5.

13 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran,* p.88.

14 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.19–20; Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* I, 4.3.

15 H. Pirnia, *Iran Bastan: Tarikh-e Mofassal-e-Iran-e Ghadeem* [Ancient Iran: A Comprehensive History of Old/Past Iran] (Tehran: Sherkat-e-Matbooat, 1932), p.1251.

16 Sekunda, *The Persian Army 560–323 BC.*

17 Arrian as cited in Pirnia, *Iran Bastan,* p.1257.

18 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.21.

19 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran,* p.89.

20 Ibid., p.89; Pirnia, *Iran Bastan,* p.1282.

21 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.30.

22 Ibid., 17.31.

23 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* III, 2.

24 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.33.

25 Ibid., 17.34.

26 Ibid.

27 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus,* XI, 9.

28 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII,* 17.54.

29 Ibid.

30 Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army,* pp.43, 72.

31 Sekunda, *The Persian Wars 560–330 BC,* p.29.

32 Pirnia, *Iran Bastan,* p.1379.

33 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran,* p.93.

34 Plutarch, *Parallel Lives VII,* Alexander IV, 31.

35 Pirnia, *Iran Bastan,* p.1381.

36 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* IV, 11.

37 Pirnia, *Iran Bastan,* p.1392.

38 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander,* V, 1

39 The quote from Kaboli is in the article "Susa Withstood Alexander's Invasion" www.cais-soas.com/News/2006/April2006/09-04-susa.htm April 9, 2006.

40 H. Speck, "Alexander at the Persian Gates: A Study in Historiography and Topography," *American Journal of Ancient History*, (2002, Vol.1/1), pp.15–234; H. Koch, "Die achämenidische Poststraße von Persepolis nach Susa," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (1986, Vol.19), pp.133–147; Pirnia, *Iran Bastan.*

41 Pirnia, *Iran Bastan*, p.1413.

42 Ibid.

43 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* III, 6.4; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII*, 17.68; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, III, 3–4.

44 Ibid. Compare with Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.140.

45 Pirnia, *Iran Bastan*, p.1420.

46 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII*, 17.69–72.

47 Plutarch, *Parallel Lives VII*, Alexander 51.

48 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII*, 17.72.1–2.

49 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* XXIX, 1–11.

50 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, VII, 6.20.

51 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* III, 7.2.

52 This was vandalized by the invading Arabs in the 7th century AD.

53 Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, V, 13; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History VIII*, 17.73.

54 W. Tarn, *Alexander* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p.146.

55 Plutarch, *Parallel Lives VII* Alexander 70; Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* VII, 4.4.

56 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* VII, 6.4; VII, 11.6.

57 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.140.

58 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* VII, 11.9; VII, 6.1.

59 Ibid., VI, 30.2–3.

60 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.144.

61 M. Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.78; P. Kriwaczek, *In search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas that Changed the World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002). pp.87, 203.

62 P. W. Roberts, *Journey of the Magi: In Search of the Birth of Jesus* (Toronto, Canada: Stoddart Publishing, 1995), p.355.

63 R. N. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1988), p.19.

64 Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, p.78; Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.139.

65 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* IV, 7.4; VII, 8.2.

66 E. Fredricksmeyer, "Alexander and Philip: Emulation and Resentment," *Classical Journal* (1990, Vol.85), pp.300–315.

67 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.151.

Chapter 7: The Seleucids and the rise of Parthia

1 Iranian military historiography (Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*) confirms that the cavalry were from the Aryan caste of nobles. These continued to form the basis of Iranian cavalry until the AD 650s.

2 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.129.

3 R. N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962) figure 40.

4 Paper by Colonel Hedayat Behzadi, *Artesh* [lit. Army] (June 1976).

5 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.132.

6 Ibid., p.132; Consult also Polyaenus, *Strategemata*, VII, 39–40.

7 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.145.

8 Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarmain (the Head of the Soudavar Foundation in London) has noted this tendency in an article entitled "The Other Terror," www.iranian.com/FSFF/2005/February/Terror/index.html.

9 P. Bernard, "An ancient Greek city in Central Asia," *Scientific American* (1994, Special Issue-Ancient Cities), pp.66–75.

10 P. Bernard, "Campaigne de fouilles 1976–1977 a Ay Khanum," *Comptes Rendu de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (April–June 1977), pp.458–460.

11 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.165.

12 E. T. Newell, *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1938), pp.159–160.

13 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander,* IV, 1.5; Quintus Curtius Rufus, *The History of Alexander*, 1, 14.

14 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XLI, 4.

15 Ibid., Prologi, 41; Strabo, *Geographica*, XI, 515.

16 See Behistun inscriptions of Darius the Great; A. D. H. Bivar, "The political history of Iran under the Arsacids," in E. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.3(1) The Seleucid, Parthian and Sassanian Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.21–99: p.27.

17 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI, 514.

18 Sulimirski, "The Sarmatians", Introduction and chapter 1; these clearly delineate the ethnic and cultural links between the Parthians and their northern Iranian kin, the Saka and the Massagetae.

19 P. Wilcox, *Rome's Enemies (3) Parthians and Sassanid Persians* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1986), p.6.

20 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XII, 4; Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.29. As noted by Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.207, Andragoras' name is certainly not a Hellenicized version of an Iranian name.

21 Syncellus (ed. W. Dindorf), *Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae XIII* (Bonn, 1829), p.539; F. Jacoby (ed.), *Die Fragemente der Griechischen Historiker* [The Fragments/Writings Greek Historians] (Berlin: Leiden, 1986) 156, 858–859. See J. Wolski, "Andragoras etait-il Iranien ou Grec? [Andragoras was he Iranian or Greek?]" *Studia Iranica* (1975, Vol.4), pp.166–169.

22 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI, 515 narrates Ashk as having originally been a governor of King Diodotus (r. *c*.250–*c*.238 BC) of Greco-Bactria. According to this narrative, Ashk first revolted against Diodotus and then fled southwards by migrating into the Parthava province of Iran.

23 Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria (trans.), *Bundahishn (Bombay:* Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956), XXXV, 43–44.

24 Wolski, "Andragoras etait-il Iranien ou Grec?" pp.166–169.

25 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XLI, 4.

26 Ibid.

27 Polybius (trans. W. R. Paton), *Histories*, 6 volumes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1922–27), *Vol.III*, V, 55.2, VIII, 23.

28 The campaign was sponsored by loot taken from the temple of Anahita in Ecbatana, after the subjugation of Media, Polybius, *Histories Vol.IV,* X, 27.13.

29 There is debate as to the identity of the king: Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," pp.29–30 provides an analysis of the various views.

30 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.170.

31 Polybius, *Histories Vol.IV*, XI, 39.

32 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.171.

33 E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde Hellénistique (323–30 av. J.C.)* [Political History of the Hellenistic World] (Nancy: l'Université de Nancy, 1979–1982), pp.200–202.

34 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.32.

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36 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.32.

37 Pliny the Elder (trans. H. Rackham et al.), *Natural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938–62), Vol.II, VI, 152.

38 Isidore of Charax (trans. W. H. Schoff), *Parthian Stations* (Chicago: Area, 1989), p.7.

39 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.31.

40 Strabo, *Geographica*, XIII, 523.
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43 Islamic sources including the *Hodud-ol-Alam*, Ibn-Hawqal, al-Muqaddasi, Yaqut al-Hamavi, and the *Borhan-e-Qate*.
44 Al-Masudi as cited by T. Atabaki, Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp.8–9.
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47 A. Hakimi, "Mujassame-ye Herkul dar Bisitun [The statue of Hercules in Behistun]," *Majalle-ye Bastanshenasi* (1959–60, vols.III & IV), pp.3–12.
48 P. Daffina, *L'immigrazione dei Saka nella Drangiana* [The immigration of the Saka in Drangiana] (Rome: Is.M.E.O, 1967), pp.41–43.
49 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XXXVIII, 10.2.
50 Bivar, "The political history of Iran under the Arsacids," pp.37–38.
51 Ibid., p.38.
52 Ibid.
53 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.151.
54 The Pashtos of Afghanistan today speak a northeast Iranian dialect descended from the Saka.
55 Tacitus (trans. J. Jackson), A*nnals, Books IV–VI, XI–XII* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), VI, 31.
56 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XI, 15.
57 Ibid., XLII, 1; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History XI*, 24.18.
58 See discussion in Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.213.
59 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History Vol.II*, VI, 112.
60 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.91.
61 J. Dobras, "Les premiers rapports des Romains avec les Parthes et l'occupation de la Syrie [The first contacts of the Romans with the Parthians and the occupation of Syria]," *Archiv Orientalni* (1931, Vol.3), pp.218–221.
62 M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), p.53.
63 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI, 528. It is worth noting that the Seleucids did attack Artashes but his successes proved ephemeral.
64 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.41.
65 Appian (trans. H. White), *Roman History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912) The Syrian Wars, 48.
66 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.214.
67 Bivar, "The Political History of Iran under the Arsacids," p.42.
68 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI, 532.
69 L. Raditsa, "Iranians in Asia Minor," in Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.3(1)*, pp.100–115: p.106.
70 Ibid, p.107.
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75 Dandamaev & Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, p.300.
76 Ibid, p.113.
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Chapter 8: Parthia challenges Rome

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3 Ibid., 24.
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5 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.152.
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8 Justinus, *Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, 41.2.
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Chapter 9: Parthia from Mark Antony to the Alan invasions

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9 Ibid., Vol. VI, LI, 18.
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Chapter 10: Emperor Trajan's bid to destroy Parthia

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Chapter 11: The decline and fall of Parthia

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44. Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.149.
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47. Ghirshman, *The Art of Ancient Iran* (Vol.I) (New York: Golden Press, 1964), p.35.
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52. Pliny, *Natural History*, Vol.IX, XXXIV, 41, 145.
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Chapter 12: The rise of the Sassanian Dynasty

1. *Shapur Kaba Zartusht* (SKZ), Greek line 1, in translation in Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, App.4.
2. *Loghat-Name-ye Ta'alif Dehkhoda zeer Nazar-e Mohammad Moin* [The Dictionary of Dehkhoda supervised by Mohammad Moin]. The Kurdish history epic of the *Sharaf-Nameh* written in Persian in the 16th century does not list the Shabankareh as Kurdish. This may be due to the tribe having been Persianzied by the 16th century. D. D. Peshotan Sanjana (trans.), *The Kârnâmak î Ardashîr î Babakân* (Bombay: Education Society, 1896) (I, 7) also mentions the ancestors of the Sassanians having lived among the Kurds as far back as the post-Alexandrian era.
3. A. h. Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran az aghz ta saqut saltnat Pahlvi* (Tehran: Sukhan, 2002), p.185.
4. Islamic historians such as al-Tabari have noted of Ardavan addressing Ardashir as a "Kurd, born in the tent of Kurds and raised with Kurds."
5. M. H. Dodgeon & S. N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226–363)* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.35–36.
6. Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.183.
7. R. N. Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.3(1)*, pp.116–117.
8. Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.184.
9. Ibid. The brothers had conspired to kill Ardashir. However the plot was discovered and they were executed.
10. Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.185.
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12. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* Vol.IX, LXXX, 3, 1–2.
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21 Farrokh, *Elite Sassanian Cavalry*, pp.15, 46, Pl.A.

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34 Ibid., VI, 4.

35 Zonaras, *Annales*, XII, 15

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38 The full account of these campaigns are provided by Herodian, *History of the Empire*, Vol.II, VI 5.1–6, 6.

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84 E. Renan, *Marc-Aurele et la Fin de la Monde Antique* [Marcus Aurelius and the end of the Classical World] (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1923), p.279. For a further discussion of Mithraism and Christianity, see Hinnells, *Persian Mythology*, pp.74–91 and I. J. S. Taraporewala, *The religion of Zoroaster* (Tehran: Sazman e Faravahar, 1980), pp.150–159.

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88 For the name Patik, refer to K. Rundolph Justi, "Die Bedeutung des Kolner Mani-Codex fur die Manichaismusforschung," in P. Levy and E. Wolff (eds.), *Melanges d'Histoires des Religions offerts a Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris, 1974), pp.474, n.2. Ibn al-Nadeem (ed. & trans. B, Dodge), *The Fihrist* (Kazi Publications, 1998), pp.327–328.

89 For the name Kamsakaran, refer to F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895), p.154. For further information of Mani's mother from the Kamsarakan clan, refer also to W. B. Henning, "The Book of Giants," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1943, Vol.11/4), pp.52.

90 Like Zoroaster, Mani preached that both the cosmic universe and the human being are battlegrounds in the eternal war of good against evil. Mani, however, taught that the power of good was equal to the power of evil. This philosophy may be a borrowing from the older Zurvan cult of ancient Luristan which describes the existence of two brothers, Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) who stands for good, and Ahriman (Ahra Mainyu) who is the essence of evil.

Zurvan, who represents infinite time, is father to both Ohrmazd and Ahriman. This is strikingly similar to the Indo-European mythology of the Vikings, notably the god Odin and his sons Thor (representing good) and Loki (representing evil).

91 Cotterell, *Classical Civilizations*, p.243. According to 248th psalm in the Manichaean Psalm-Book, "they [bodies and souls] have been enemies since the creation of the worlds." Refer to G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.13.

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93 Ibn al-Nadeem, *Al-Fihrist*, p.328, II, 26ff; see translation p.776.

94 Widengren, "Manichaeism and its Iranian background," p.969. The *Shapurakan* was written in Middle Persian or Sassanian Pahlavi. Mani spoke Parthian Pahlavi.

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96 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.197.

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101 J. E. Bamberger (trans.), *The Pratikos* (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970). There are also references to St. Nilus of Constantinople (*c.*448) who made the observation. See also Widengren, "Manichaeism and its Iranian background," p.986.

102 Widengren, "Manichaeism and its Iranian background," p.986 argues the date as early as AD 297. It is possible that the Manicheans were at least partly responsible for the anti-Roman revolts in Egypt in AD 297. Widengren also provides a commentary on the spread of Mani's doctrines to the west, including Egypt.

103 Ibid., pp.986–987.

104 St. Augustine (383) made contact with the Manichaean community in Rome. The strength of this community is indicated by the *Liber Pontificalis* which notes that Pope Miltiades (311–314) had commented on the existence of the followers of Mani in Rome. It is interesting that Valentinian's edict (AD 372) was apparently intended to crush the Manichaeans in Rome. Refer to Widengren, "Manichaeism and its Iranian background" p.987; Cotterell, *Classical Civilizations*, p.51.

105 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.199.

106 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," pp.118–119.

107 H. W. Bird, "Diocletian and the deaths of Carus, Carinus and Numerian," *Latomus* (1976, Vol.35), pp.123–132; Eutropius, IX, 18.1 in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, p.113.

108 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Carus, 8.

109 Jerome, *Chronicum*, 284, pp.224–225, 1, in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, p.113.

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111 Theophanes (tr. C. Mango & R. Scott), *The Chronicles of Theophanes the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), AM 5793, 9.1–15.

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113 Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, p.125.

114 Festus, *Breviarum*, 25, p.65, in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, pp.126–127.

115 Eutropius, IX, 24–25, in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, p.127.

Chapter 13: Shapur II: a new revival of Sassanian Persia

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2 D. Whitehouse & A. Williamson, "Sasanian maritime trade," *Iran* (1973, Vol.11), p.32.

3 Anklesaria, *Bundahishn*, XXXIII, 16.

4 As cited in Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran: tarikh-i Iran az aghz ta saqut saltnat Pahlvi*, p.206.

5 R. N. Frye, "The Sassanian System of Walls for Defense," in M. Rosen-Ayalon (ed.) *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp.7–15: pp.8–11.

6 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," p.138.

7 Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, pp.203–204.

8 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.27–28, 47–50.

9 Ibid., pp.27–28.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p.28, 53–54.

12 Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, XIX, 2.

13 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.27–28, 48, Pl.D, 61.

14 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Vol.I, II, 21.22–3.

15 Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* I, 11–12 in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, p.165.

16 Julian, *Oriatones*, II, 62B-67A (III, 11–13.30, pp.132–138, in translation in Dodgeon & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier*, pp.198–199.

17 Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, XVIII, 10.

18 Ibid., XIX, 1.

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20 Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, IX, 15, 3, translation (French) in R. M. Rattenbury & T. W. Lumb (trans.) *Les Ethiopiques* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1935–1943), iii, pp.56–58; Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.28.

21 S. Gregory, "Was there an Eastern origin for the design of Late Roman Fortifications," in D. L. Kennedy (ed.), *The Roman Army in the East* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), pp.169–209.

22 Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire* XIX, 1.

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24 Ibid., XIX, 2.

25 Ibid., XIX, 5.

26 Ibid., XIX, 7.

27 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, pp.208–209.

28 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.47–50.

29 Ibid., p.47.

30 Ibid.

31 Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, p.53.

32 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, Plate D, pp.61–62.

33 Ibid., p.49.

Chapter 14: The Tumultumous Fifth Century

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5 E. J. Keall, "The Sassanians (226–651 AD)," in Cotterell, *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Classical Civilizations*, pp.177–192: p.181.

6 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.172.

7 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.319.

8 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.215.

9 Keall, "The Sassanians (226–651 AD)," p.181.

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11 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.172.

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13 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.173.

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20 Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia*, p.38.

21 Data from the expedition provided to the author by Dr. Hossein Momeniazandaryani, of Hamedan University, on January 21, 2005.

22 The Pahlavi (Middle Persian) works such as the Khudai-Nameh, Ayin-Nameh, and Arteshtarestan.

23 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.41.

24 To this day the actions of Vasag Suni are recalled with much disdain by Armenian sources.

25 R. W. Thompson (trans.), *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's Press, Suren D. Fesjian Academic Publications, 1991) pp.63, 105.

26 G. Greatrex & S. N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persians Wars: a narrative sourcebook,vol.2 (AD 363–630)* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p.55.

27 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.219.

28 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.184.

29 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.52–53.

30 Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sassanians," p.146.

31 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.221.

32 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.60.

33 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 20–25, Akhbar al-Tawal, p.29. This ruse is similar to that in the *Shahname* when the mythical hero Rustam fell into a trap laden with spikes and sharp objects.

34 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.222; Akhbar al-Tawal, p.29.

35 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.184; Akhbar al-Tawal, p.29; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 20–25.

36 Tabari al-usul Wal-Muluk (trans. J. A. Williams et al), *The History of al-Tabari*, 39 volumes (New York, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985–1988) Vol.2, pp.631–634; Akhbar al-Tawal, p.29; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 20–25.

37 Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol.2, pp.631–634; also Tabari, *Iran during the Sassanians*, pp.359–397; *History of Persia before Islam*, p.464.

38 For a detailed discussion of the Savaran's defeat in AD 484, see Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.52–53.

Chapter 15: The Kavad Era

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3 G. Parker (ed.), *The Times Atlas of World History* (London: Hammond Incorporated, 3rd edition, 1993), pp.105, 108.

4 Zarrin'kub, *Ruzgaran:tarikh-i Iran*, p.223.

5 For a full discussion of the origins of Mazdakism and its doctrines, see E. Yarshater, "Mazdakism," in Yarshater, *The Cambridge History of Iran: Vol.3(2)*, pp.991–1024.

6 Yarshater, "Mazdakism," pp.995–1006. There appears to have been an original "Mazdak the Older" who was the originator of the sect, followed by a "Mazdak the Younger." Mazdak the Older was originally one of the high priests of the magi from Persis, who established a sect known as the Mazdakites or the Khurramiyya by Islamic sources.

7 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," p.150.

8 Yarshater, "Mazdkism," pp.1006–1007.

9 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.175.

10 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," p.150.

11 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.244.

12 Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, p.173.

13 The major academic project resulting in this shift is G. Herrmann's seminal paper "Parthian and Sassanian saddlery: new light from the Roman West," L. de Meyer & E. Haerinck (eds.), *Archaeologia iranica et orientalis: miscellanea in honorem Louis vanden Berghe*, Vol.2 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Presse, 1989), pp.757–809. See also Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.18–19.

14 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.178.

15 G. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532 AD* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998), pp.51–52.

16 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.224.

17 Ibid., p.176 also states that the main reason for the war was Rome's refusal to pay its financial share necessary for the upkeep of the Caucasian passes.

18 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," p.151.

19 Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.177.

20 Frye, "The political history of Iran under the Sassanians," p.151.

21 Theophanes, *The Chronicles*, AM 5997, 147.6–24.

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23 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I.8.11–19.

24 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II.13.8–15.

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26 Zachariah, *Historia*, IX.2, 92.25–93.27; see also Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.41.

27 Procopius, as cited by Motofi, *Tarikh-e-Chahar Hezar Sal-e Artesh-e Iran*, p.178.

28 Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, p.189.

29 Detailed descriptions of this battle in Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, pp.200–207, and Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, pp.50–52.

Chapter 16: Khosrow I, renaissance and revival

1 S. G. W. Benjamin, *Persia* (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1888), p.232.

2 Z. Rubin, " The reforms of Khosrow Anushirwan," in A. Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 1990), pp.227–297.

3 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.8;

4 Ibid., pp.8, 14; Shapur Shahbazi, "Sasanian Army": http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Military/sasanian_army.htm.

5 Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*; Maurice, *Strategikon*, XI.1, 354–360.

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7 Haerinck & Overlaet, *Luristan Excavation Documents*, p.268.

8 Ibid.

9 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, pp.96–97.

10 Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, I, 958.

11 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 5.7, 28–33.

12 Ibid., II, 9.14–18.

13 Ibid., II, 11.1–38.

14 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.106.

15 Ibid., p.108.

16 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 18.1–26.

17 Ibid., II, 19.26–46.

18 Ibid., II, 20.17–19, 240.13–241.3.

19 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.110.

20 Zacharia, 173.23-174.2, in translation in Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.111.

21 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.113.

22 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 15.1–30.

23 Ibid., II, 17.1–28.

24 Ibid., VIII, 4.4–5.

25 Ibid., II, 19.47–9.

26 Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.26.

27 E. Stein, *Histoire du bas-Empire*, volume 2 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949), pp.499–500.
28 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 25.1-35
29 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier Vol.2*, p.116.
30 Ibid.
31 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 30.15–22.
32 Ibid., VIII, 8.21–38.
33 Ibid., VIII, 14.1–44.
34 Agathias, *The Histories*, II, 19.5–21.11.
35 Greatrex & Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier: sourcebook*, p.131.
36 One striking example of this is a Sassanian long overcoat or Caftan in the Caucasus, housed in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (Inv.Kz.6584), identical to those worn by Sassanian nobles in the Tagh-e-Bostan carvings. See also Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry*, p.20.
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AL

"Persians, I have assembled you to make this demand, that you bear yourselves bravely and never sully the great and glorious former achievements of the Persians ... I know that we march against valiant men, and if we overcome them it is certain that no other human army will ever withstand us."

Herodotus, The Histories, 7.53, reporting the speech of Xerxes before his invasion of Greece in 480 BC

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